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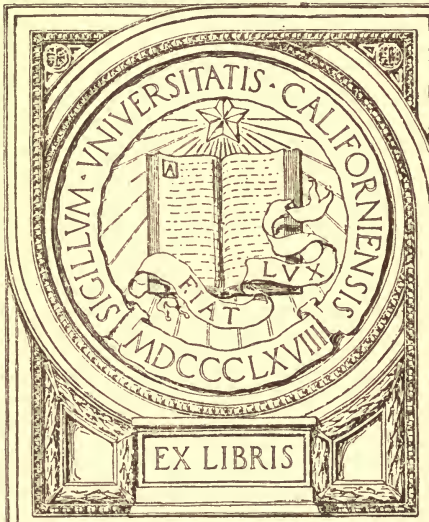

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MONSIEUR MOTTE

By GRACE KING

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TO

Mr. Charles Dudley Warner,

WHOSE KINDLY RECOGNITION OF THE POSSIBILITIES
OF SOUTHERN LITERATURE HAS BEEN AN
ENCOURAGEMENT TO SOUTHERN
WRITERS.

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MONSIEUR MOTTE.

MONSIEUR MOTTE.

IT was near mid-day in June. A dazzling stream of vertical sun-rays fell into the quadrangular courtyard of the Institute St. Denis, and filled it to suffocation with light and heat. The flowers which grew in little beds, dotting the gray-flagged surface, bowed their heads under their leaves for shelter.

A thin strip of shadow, stretching from the side of the schoolhouse, began to creep over the garden, slowly following the sun in its progress past the obtruding walls of neighboring buildings, until he should disappear behind a certain square steeple far off in the distance; then the shade would entirely cover the yard; then the stars would be coming out, languid and pale; and then the fragrance of oleander

and jasmine, travelling from yard to yard, would burden the air, soothing the senses in order to seduce the imagination.

Along the narrow shaded strip, quite filling it up, moved a class of girls in Indian file, their elbows scraping against the rugged bricks of the wall as they held their books up to the openings of their sun-bonnets. A murmur of rapidly articulated words, like the murmur of boiling water in a closed kettle, came from the leaves of their books, while from their hidden lips dropped disjointed fragments of "l'Histoire de France."

The foundation, as well as key-stone, of St. Denisian education, it was but natural that the examination in "l'Histoire de France, par D. Lévi Alvares, père," should fill the last days of the scholastic term; and as a prize in that exercise set the brightest crown upon the head of the victor, it was not strange that it should be conducted with such rigidity and impartiality as to demoralize panic-stricken contestants whose sex usually warranted justice in leaving one eye at least unbound.

Under the circumstances, a trust in luck is

the most reliable source of comfort. If experience proved anything, if the study of the history of France itself made one point clear, it was the dependence of great events on trifles, the unfailing interposition of the *inattendu*, and, consequently, the utter futility of preparation. The graduating class of 1874 turned their pages with clammy fingers, and repeated mechanically, with unwearied tongues, any passage upon which Fate should direct their eyes; none dared be slighted with impunity, the most insignificant being perhaps the very one to trip them up; the most familiar, the traitor to play them false. A laggard church clock in the neighborhood gave them each eleven separate, distinct shocks. It warned them that two minutes and a half had already been consumed on the road from one class-room to the other, and reminded them of Monsieur Mignot's diabolical temper.

A little girl, also in a large sun-bonnet, with a placard marked "*Passe-Partout*" around her neck, turned an angle of the building suddenly and threw the nervous ranks into dire confusion; the books went down, the bonnets up.

"*Seigneur! qu'est-ce que c'est?*"

"*Ma chère!* how you frightened me!"

"*Mon Dieu!* I thought it was Monsieur Mignot!"

"I am trembling all over!"

"I can hardly stand up!"

"Just feel how my heart beats!"

"You had better hurry up, *mes enfants*," replied the little one, in the patronizing tone of personal disinterestedness; "it is past eleven."

"But we don't know one word," they groaned in unison, — "not one single word."

"Ah, bah! you are frightened, that's all; you always say that." She gave one of them a good-natured push in the direction of the door about which they were standing in distressful hesitation.

"I tell you, old Mignot is in a horrible temper. *Il a fait les quatre cents coups* in our class; threw his inkstand at Stéphanie Morel's head."

The door, with startling coincidence, was violently pulled open at these words, and a gray-haired, spectacled old gentleman thrust out an irate face in quest of his dilatory class. Thrown by the catastrophe into a state of complete nes-

cience of all things historical, from Clovis to Napoleon, the young ladies jerked off their sun-bonnets and entered the room, while the little girl escaped at full speed. A drowsy, quiet, peaceful half-hour followed in the yard, — a surprising silence for the centre of a busy city, considering the close proximity of two hundred school-girls. It was a mocking contrast to the scene of doubt, hesitation, and excitement on the other side of the closed door, — a contrast advantageous to the uneducated happiness of the insects and flowers.

A door-bell rang; not the bell of the pretty little gate which admitted visitors to the rose-hedged, violet-bordered walk leading to Madame's *antichambre*, but the bell of the capacious *porte-cochère* which was reserved for the exits and entrances of scholars and domestics. After a carefully measured pause, the ring was repeated, then again, and again. The rusty organ of intercommunication squeaked and creaked plaintively after each disturbance as if forced from a sick-bed to do painful and useless service. A gaunt, red-haired woman finally came out in obedience to the summons, with an elaboration

of slowness which the shuffling sabots clearly betrayed to the outsider, as evidenced by a last superfluous, unnecessarily energetic pull of the bell-knob.

She carefully unrolled her sleeves as she sauntered along, and stood until she loosened the cord which reefed her dress to an unconventional height. Then she opened the *grille* and looked out.

"*Ah, je le savais bien*," she muttered, with strong Gascon accent.

There was a diminutive door cut into the large gate. It looked, with its coat of fresh paint, like a barnacle on the weather-beaten exterior. Opening with the facility of greased hinges, it was an unavoidable compromise between the heavy cypress timber and iron fastenings, prescribed by the worldly, or heavenly, experience of St. Denis as the proper protection of a young ladies' boarding-school, and the almost incessant going and coming which secluded femininity and excluded shops made necessary.

"But I can't get in there!" said a woman outside.

"*Tant pis.*" And the little door was closed.

"But I must come in with my basket."

A shrug of the shoulders was the only reply through the *grille.*

"It is Mamzelle Marie's toilet for the exhibition."

The little gate was again held open.

"Don't you see I can't get in there?"

"*Ça m'est égal.*"

A snort of exasperation was heard on the outside, and a suppressed "*C'est un peu fort!*"

"Will you open the big gate for me so that I can bring in Mamzelle Marie's dress?"

No answer.

"Well, then, I shall ring at Madame's bell."

The white woman did not lack judgment. She was maintaining her own in a quarrel begun years ago; a quarrel involving complex questions of the privileges of order and the distinctions of race; a quarrel in which hostilities were continued, year by year, with no interruptions of courtesy or mitigation by truce. This occasion was one of the perquisites of Jeanne's position of *femme de ménage,* — slight compensation enough when compared to the indignities put upon her as a white woman, and the humilia-

tions as a sensitive one by "*cette négresse Marcelite.*" But the duration of triumph must be carefully measured. Marcélite's ultimatum, if carried out, would quickly reverse their relative positions by a bonus to Marcélite in the shape of a reprimand to Jeanne. She allowed her foe, however, to carry her basket in the hot sun as far as the next bell, and even waited until she put her hand on it before the iron bar fell and the massive structure was allowed to swing open.

"*Ristocrate!*" she muttered, without looking at either woman or basket.

"*Canaille!*" whispered the other, with her head thrown back and her nose in the air.

Glancing at the line of shade in the yard to see how near it was to twelve o'clock, for want of other accommodation Marcélite went into an open arbor, put her basket on the floor, and wiped her face with a colored foulard handkerchief. "*Fait chaud mo dit toi,*" she said aloud in creole, her language for self-communion. She pulled her skirts out on each side, and sat down with a force that threatened the stability of the bench; then, careless of creeping and crawling

possibilities, leaned her head back against the vine-covered wall. The green leaves formed a harmonious frame for the dark-brown face, red and yellow *tignon*, and the large gold ear-rings hanging beneath two glossy *coques* of black wool. Her features were regular and handsome according to the African type, with a strong, sensuous expression, subdued but not obliterated. Her soft black eyes showed in their voluptuous depths intelligence and strength and protecting tenderness. Her stiff purple calico dress settled in defining folds about her portly limbs. A white kerchief was pinned over her untrammelled bosom; her large, full, supple waist was encircled by the strings of her apron, which were tied in a careful bow at her side.

Besides the large basket, she carried on her arm a small covered one, which, if opened, would reveal her calling to be that of hairdressing. She was the hairdresser of the school, and as such, the general *chargée d'affaires*, *confidente*, messenger, and adviser of teachers and scholars. Her discretion was proven beyond suspicion. Her judgment, or rather her intuition, was bold, quick, and effective. In truth, Marcélite was as indis-

pensable as a lightning-rod to the boarding-school, conducted as it was under the austere discipline of the old régime. Her smooth, round hands and taper fingers had been polished by constant friction with silken locks; her familiar, polite, gentle, servile manners were those contracted during a courtly life of dependent intimacy with superiors. It was said that her basket carried other articles besides combs, brushes, and cosmetics, and that her fingers had been found preferable to the post-office for the delivery of certain implicative missives written in the prose or verse of irresistible emotion. Even without her basket, any one, from her hands, gait, and language, would recognize a hairdresser of the élite, while in New Orleans, in the *Quartier Créole*, there was hardly a man, woman, or child who did not call her by name; Marcélite Gaulois.

She lifted a palmetto fan, bound and tied to her waist with black ribbon, and holding it up between her and observation, betook herself in quiet and privacy to slumber, — a nap of delicious relaxation, so gentle that the bite of a mosquito, the crawling of an ant, an incipient

snore, startled it; but so tenacious that the uplifted hand and dropping head resettled themselves without breaking its delicate filaments. A little, thin, rusty-voiced bell had now one of its three important daily announcements to make, — Recreation Time. From all over the city came corroborative evidence of the fact, by chronometers, some a little ahead and some a little behind meridian. This want of unanimity proclaimed the notorious and distressing difference of two minutes and a half between Church and State, — a difference in which the smallest watch in the school could not avoid participation.

It was the same little girl with the "*Passe-Partout*" who published the truce to study. The rope of the bell and she were both too short, so she had to stand on tiptoe and jerk it in little quick jumps. The operation involved a terrible disproportion between labor invested and net profit, for which nothing but the gladsome nature of her mission, and the honorary distinction implied in it, could have compensated her. A moment of stillness, during which both the rope and the little girl quieted them-

selves, and then, a shower of little girls fell into the yard, — all of them little girls, but not all of them children, and as much alike as drops of different colored water.

They were all dressed in calico dresses made in the same way, with very full, short skirts, and very full, short waists, fastened, matron-fashion, in front. They all wore very tight, glossy, fresh, black French kid boots, with tassels or bows hanging from the top. With big sun-bonnets, or heavily veiled hats on their heads, thick gloves on their hands, and handkerchiefs around their necks, they were walking buttresses against the ardent sun. They held their lunch baskets like bouquets, and their heads as if they wore crowns. They carried on conversations in sweet, low voices, with interrupting embraces and apostrophic tendernesses: —

"*Chère!*"

"*Chérie!*"

"*Ange!*"

"*M'amie!*"

They had a grace of ease, the gift of generations; a self-composure and polish, dating from

the cradle. Of course they did not romp, but promenaded arm in arm, measuring their steps with dainty particularity; moving the whole body with rhythmic regularity, displaying and acquiring at the same time a sinuosity of motion. Their hair hung in plaits so far below their waists that it threatened to grow into a measuring-tape for their whole length.

The angular Jeanne appeared, holding a waiter at arm's-length over her head. She had no need to cluck or chirp; the sound of her sabots was enough to call around her in an instant an eager brood of hungry boarders, jumping and snatching for their portion of lunch. There was the usual moment of obstruction over the point of etiquette whether they should take their own piece of bread and butter or receive it from Jeanne. The same useless sacrifice of a test slice was made, and the obstinate servant had to give in with the same consolatory satisfaction of having been again true to her fixed principle to make herself as disagreeable as possible under any circumstances that the day might bring forth. There is great field for choice, even in slices of bread and butter. The

ends, or knots of the loaves, split longitudinally, offer much more appetizing combinations of crust and crumb than the round inside slices. Knots, however, were the prerogative of the big girls; inside slices the grievance of the little ones. To-day, "*comme toujours*," as they said, with a shrug, the primary classes had to take what was left them. But their appetite was so good, they ate their homely fare with so much gusto, that the day scholars looked on enviously and despised their own epicurean baskets, which failed to elicit such expectations and never afforded them similar gratification.

À la fin des fins! The door which concealed the terrible struggle going on with the history of France was opened. All rushed forward for news, with eager sympathy. It was a dejected little army that filed out after so protracted a combat, with traces of tears in their eyes and all over their flushed cheeks. Tired and nervous, not one would confess to a ray of hope. Certainty of defeat had succeeded to certainty of failure. The history of France, with its disastrous appliances of chronology, dynasties, conquests, and revolutions, had gained, ac-

cording to them, a complete and unquestioned victory.

"Marie Modeste, look at Marcélite," said one of the girls, hailing the diversion.

The *bonne* was coming out of the garden-house with her basket. One of the graduating class rushed forward to meet her, and both together disappeared in the direction of the dormitory stairway. "It is her toilette for the exhibition," was whispered, and curious eyes followed the basket invested with such preternatural importance. "They say *le vieux* is going to give her a superb one."

The *Grand Concert Musicale et Distribution de Prix* was to take place the next evening. All parents and friends had, for two weeks, been invited to "assist" by their presence. This annual fête was pre-eminently *the* fête of St. Denis. It was the goal of the scholastic course, the beginning of vacation, and the set term to the young ladies' aspirations if not ambition. A fair share of books, laurel crowns, in green and gold paper, and a possible real gold medal was with them the end if not the aim of study from the opening of the school

in September. Personally they could not imagine any state or condition in life when knowledge of French history would be a comfort or cosmography an assistance; but prizes were so many concrete virtues which lasted fresh into grandmotherhood. *Noblesse oblige*, that the glory of maternal achievements be not dimmed in these very walls where their mothers, little creoles like themselves, strove for laurel crowns culled from the same imperishable tree in Rue Royale.

Marcélite followed Marie through the dormitory, down the little aisle, between the rows of beds with their veils of mosquito netting, until they came to the farthest corner; which, when one turned one's back to the rest of the chamber, had all the seclusion and "sociability" of a private apartment. The furniture, however, did not include chairs, so Marie seated herself on the side of the bed, and, taking off her bonnet, awaited Marcélite's pleasure to initiate her into the delightful mysteries of the basket.

She wondered where Marcélite had picked up the artistic expedient of heightening the

effect by playing on the feelings of the spectator; and she wondered if carrying that basket up the stairs had really tired those strong shoulders and make her so dreadfully hot; and if it were really necessary that each one of those thousand pins should be quilted into the front of that white kerchief; and if Marcélite had made a vow not to open her mouth until she got out the last pin; and if —

She was naturally nervous and impatient, and twisted and turned ceaselessly on the bed during the ordeal of assumed procrastination. Her black eyes were oversized for her face, oversized and overweighted with expression; and most of the time, as to-day, they were accompanied by half-moon shadows which stretched half-way down her cheek. Over her forehead and temples the hieroglyphic tracery of blue veins might be seen, until it became obscured under the masses of black hair whose heavy plaits burdened the delicate head and strained the slender neck. The exterior of a girl of seventeen! That frail mortal encasement which precocious inner life threatens to rend and destroy. The appealing languor, the

uncomplaining lassitude, the pathetic apathy, the transparent covering through which is seen the growth of the woman in the body of the child.

Marcélite saw upon the bed the impatient figure of a petulant girl, wild for the sight of her first *toilette de bal.* There lay on the bed, in reality, a proud, reserved, eager, passionate spirit, looking past toilettes, past graduating, past studies and examinations; looking from the prow of an insignificant vessel into the broad prospect, so near, so touching near, reserved for her, and all girls of seventeen, — that unique realm called "Woman's Kingdom."

Romances and poetry had been kept from her like wine and spices. But the flowers bloomed, and music had chords, and moonlight rays, and were the bars of the school never so strong, and the rules never so rigid, they could not prevent her heart from going out toward the rays, nor from listening to the music, nor from inhaling the breath of the flowers. And what they said is what they always say to the girl of seventeen. It is the love-time of life, when the heart first puts

forth its flowers; and what boarding-school can frustrate spring? Her mouth, like her eyes, was encircled with a shadow, faint, almost imperceptible, as was the timid suggestion of nascent passion which it gave to the thin, sad lips.

She was four years old when she came to this school; so Marcélite told her, for she could not remember. Now she was seventeen. She looked at the strong, full maturity of Marcélite. Would she, Marie, ever be like that? Had Marcélite ever been like her? At seventeen, did she ever feel this way? This — oh, this longing! Could Marcélite put her finger on the day, as Marie could, when this emotion broke into her heart, that thought into her brain? Did Marcélite know the origin of blushes, the cause of tremors? Did Marcélite ever pray to die to be relieved from vague apprehensions, and then pray to live in the faith of some great unknown but instinctive prophecy?

She forbore to ask. If Marcélite had had a mother! — But did girls even ask their mothers these things? But she had no mother! Good,

devoted, loyal as she was, Marcélite was not a mother — not her mother. She had stopped at the boundary where the mother ceases to be a physical and becomes a psychical necessity. The child still clung to Marcélite, but the young woman was motherless. She had an uncle, however, who might become a father.

"*Là!*" Marcélite had exhausted her last devisable subterfuge, and made known her readiness to begin the show.

"*Là! mon bébé! là, ma mignonne!* what do you think of that?" She turned it around by the belt; it seemed all covered over with bubbles of muslin and frostings of lace.

"Just look at that! Ah ha! I thought you would be astonished! You see that lace? *Ça c'est du vrai*, no doubt about that, — real Valenciennes. You think I don't know real lace, *hein?* and *mousseline des Indes?* You ask Madame Treize — you know what she said? 'Well, Marcélite, that is the prettiest pattern of lace and the finest piece of muslin I almost ever saw.' Madame Treize told me that herself; and it's true, for I know it myself."

"Madame Treize, Marcélite?"

Madame Treize was the *ou ne peut plus* of New Orleans for fashion and extravagance.

"Yes, Madame Treize. Who do you think was going to make your dress, *hein?* Madame *N'importe-qui?*"

"Marcélite, it must have cost so much!"

"*Eh bien,* it's all paid for. What have you got to do with that? All you have got to do is to put it on and wear it. Oh, *mon bébé! ma petite chérie!*" — what tones of love her rich voice could carry, — "if it had cost thousands and thousands of dollars it would not be too fine for you, nor too pretty."

"But, Marcélite, I will be ashamed to wear it; it is too beautiful."

But the eyes sparkled joyfully, and the lips trembled with delightful anticipations.

"Here's the body! You see those bows? That was my taste. I said to myself, 'She must have blue ribbon bows on the shoulder,' and I went back and made Madame Treize put them on. Oh, I know Madame Treize; and Madame Treize, she knows me!"

"And the shoes, Marcélite?"

Hands and voice fell with utter disgust.

"Now you see, Mamzelle, you always do that. Question, question, question, all the time. Why did n't you wait? Now you have spoiled it all, — all the surprise!"

"Pardon, Marcélite, I did not mean; but I was afraid you had forgotten — "

"Oh, *mon bébé!* when did Marcélite ever forget anything you wanted?"

Marie blushed with shame at a self-accusation of ingratitude.

"*Ma bonne* Marcélite! I am so impatient, I cannot help it."

A bundle of shoes was silently placed in her lap.

"White satin boots! Mar-cé-lite! White satin boots for me? Oh, I can't believe it! And I expected black leather! — how shall I ever thank my uncle for them; and all this? How can I ever do it?"

The radiant expression faded away from the nurse's face at these words.

"Oh, but I know it was your idea, Marcélite! My good, kind, dear Marcélite! I know it was all your idea. He never could have thought of all these beautiful things, — a man!"

She put her arms around the *bonne's* neck and laid her head on the broad, soft shoulder, as she used to do when she was a little, little girl.

"Ah, Marcélite, my uncle can never be as kind to me as you are. He gives me the money, but you —"

She felt the hands patting her back and the lips pressed against her hair; but she could not see the desperate, passionate, caressing eyes, "savoring" her like the lips of an eager dog.

"Let us try them on," said Marcélite.

She knelt on the floor and stripped off one shoe and stocking. When the white foot on its fragile ankle lay in her dark palm, her passion broke out afresh. She kissed it over and over again; she nestled it in her bosom; she talked baby-talk to it in creole; she pulled on the fine stocking as if every wrinkle were an offence, and slackness an unpardonable crime. How they both labored over the boot, — straining, pulling, smoothing the satin, coaxing, urging, drawing the foot! What patience on both sides! What precaution that the glossy white should meet with no defilement! Finally the button-holes

were caught over the buttons, and to all intents and purposes a beautiful, symmetrical, solidified satin foot lay before them.

"Too tight?"

It might have been a question, but it sounded more like the laying of a doubt.

"Too tight! just look!"

The little toes made a vigorous demonstration of contempt and denial.

"I can change them if they are."

"Do you want me to wear sabots like Jeanne?"

"They will stretch, anyhow."

Marcélite preferred yielding to her own rather than to another's conviction, even when they both were identical.

The boots were taken off, rolled in tissue-paper, and put away in the *armoire*, which was now opened to its fullest extent to receive the dress.

Marie leaned against the pillow of the bed and clasped her hands over her head. She listened dreamily and contentedly to her praises thrown off by Marcélite's fluent tongue. What would the reality be, if the foretaste were so sweet?

"I wonder what he will say, Marcélite?"

"*Qui ça?*"

"My uncle. Do you think he will be pleased?"

"What makes you so foolish, *bébé?*"

"But that's not foolish, Marcélite."

"Hum!"

"Say, Marcélite, do you think he will be satisfied?"

"Satisfied with what?"

"Oh, you know, Marcélite, — satisfied with me."

The head was thrust too far into the *armoire* for an immediate answer.

"How can I tell, Mamzelle?"

"Mamzelle! Mamzelle! Madame Marcélite!"

"Well then, *bébé*."

"Anyway, he will come to the concert — *Hein*, Marcélite?"

"What is it, Zozo?"

"My uncle; he is coming to the concert, is n't he?"

Marcélite shrugged her shoulders; her mouth was filled with pins.

"*Ma bonne!* do not be so mean; tell me if he is coming, and what he said."

"Poor gentleman! he is so old."

"Did he tell you that?"

Marie laughed; this was a standing joke between them.

"But, my child, what do you want him to say? You bother me so with your questions, I don't know what I am doing."

"But, Marcélite, it is only natural for me to want him to come to the concert and see me in my pretty dress that he gave me."

"Well, when one is old and sick—"

"Sick! ah, you did not tell me that."

"But I tell it to you all the time!"

"Oh, Marcélite!"

There is no better subject on which to exercise crude eloquence than the delinquencies of laundresses. A heinous infraction had been committed against the integrity of one of Marie's garments, and Marcélite threatened to consume the rest of the day in expressions of disgust and indignation.

"So he is *not* coming to the concert?" the girl demanded, excitedly.

"Ah! there's the bell; you had better run quick before they send for you."

"No, I am excused until time to practise my

duet. Marcélite," — the voice lost its excited tone and became pleading, humble, and timid, — "Marcélite, do you think my uncle will like me?"

"*Mon Dieu!* yes, yes, yes."

"*Mais ne t'impatiente pas, ma bonne,* I can't help thinking about it. He has never seen me — since I was a baby, I mean — and I don't recollect him at all, at all. Oh, Marcélite! I have tried so often, so often to recall him, and my *maman*" — she spoke it as shyly as an infant does the name of God in its first prayer. "If I could only go just one little point farther back, just that little bit" — she measured off a demi-centimetre on her finger — "but impossible. Maybe it will all come back to me when I see him, and the house, and the furniture. Perhaps if I had been allowed to see it only once or twice, I might be able to remember something. It *is* hard, Marcélite, it is very hard not even to be able to recollect a mother. To-morrow evening!" — she gave a long, long sigh, — "only to-morrow evening more!"

The depravity of the washerwoman must have got beyond even Marcélite's powers of

description, for she had stopped talking, but held her head inside the shelf.

"One reason I want him to come to the concert is to take me home with him. In the first place, Madame would n't let me go unless he came for me; and — and I want the girls to see him; they have teased me so much about him. I believe, Marcélite, that if my graduating were put off one day longer, or if my uncle did not come for me to-morrow evening, I would die. How foolish! Just think of all these years I have been here, summer after summer, the only boarder left during vacation! I did n't seem to mind it then, but now it 's all different; everything has become so different this last year."

The tears had been gathering in her eyes for some time, and she had been smearing them with her finger off the side of her face to escape Marcélite's notice; but now they came too fast for that, so she was forced to turn over and hide her face flat in the pillow.

"Crying, *mon bébé?* What is the matter with you — oh, oh! — you do not feel well! something you do not like about your toilette, *hein?*

Tell Marcélite, *chérie;* tell your *bonne.* There! there!"

Sobs were added to tears, until she seemed in conflict with a tornado of grief. She pressed her head tighter and tighter against the pillow to stifle the noise, but her narrow, high shoulders shook convulsively, and her feet twisted and turned, one over the other, in uncontrollable agitation. Marcélite stood by her side, a look of keen torture on her emotional face. If the child had only been larger, or stronger! if she did not writhe so helplessly before her! if she had fought less bravely against the rending sobs! Ah! and if the shrouded form of a dead mother had not intervened with outstretched arms and reproachful eyes fixed upon Marcélite. She could hold out no longer, but fell on her knees by the bed, and clasped her arms around the little one to hold her quiet. With her face on the pillow, and her lips close to the red, burning ear, she whispered the soothing tendernesses of a maternal heart. There was a balsam which never failed: a story she had often told, but which repetition had only made more difficult, more hesitating; to-day the

words fell like lead, — about the father Marie had never seen, the mother she had never known, the home-shelter of her baby years, beyond even her imagination, and the guardian uncle, the question of whose coming to the concert had so excited her.

"Is Marie Modeste here?" asked a little voice through a far-off door.

Marie started. "Yes." Her voice was rough, weak, and trembling.

"They want you for the '*Cheval de Bronze.*'"

She sat up and let the nurse smooth her hair and bathe her face, keeping her lips tightly shut over the ebbing sobs.

"Thank you, Marcélite. Thank you for everything — for my beautiful dress, and my shoes; and thank my uncle too, and try and persuade him to come to-morrow evening, won't you, Marcélite? Do not tell him about my crying, though. Oh, I want to go home so much, and to see him! You know if you want you can get him to come. Won't you promise me, *ma bonne?*"

"You know I would kill myself for you, *mon bébé.*"

The good little Paula was waiting outside the door. Uncontrollable tears are too common in a girls' school to attract attention. They were crises which, though not to be explained, even the smallest girl understood intuitively, and for which were tacitly employed convenient conventional excuses.

"The *concours* was very difficult, *chère?*"

"Yes, very difficult."

"And Monsieur Mignot is so trying. I think he gets more *exigeant* every day."

And they kissed each other sympathetically on the stairway.

"*Grand Dieu Seigneur!*" groaned Marcélite, when Marie had left the room, holding her head with both hands. "What am I going to do now! I believe I am turning fool!"

Life was changing from a brilliant path in white muslin dresses to a hideous dilemma; and for once she did not know what to do. A travail seemed going on in her brain; her natural strength and audacity had completely oozed away from her. She began a vehement monologue in creole, reiterating assertions and explanations, stopping short always at one point.

"My God! I never thought of that."

She looked towards the ceiling with violent reproaches to the *bon Dieu, doux Jésus, and Sainte-Vierge.* Why had they left her alone to manage this? They knew she was a "nigger, nigger, nigger" (trying to humiliate and insult herself). Why had n't they done something? Why could n't they do something now? And all she had done for them, and that ungrateful patron saint, the recipient of so much attention, so many favors! She never had asked them anything for herself, thank God! Marcélite could always manage her own affairs without the assistance of any one. But her *bébé*, for whom she had distinctly prayed and burned candles, and confessed and communed, and worked, and toiled, and kept straight! She clasped her flesh in her sharp, long nails, and the pain did her good. She could have dashed her head against the wall. She would gladly have stripped her shoulders to the lash, if — if it would do any good. She would kill herself, for the matter of that, but what would that prevent or remedy? The church was not far off, perhaps a miracle! But what miracle can avert the

inevitable? She shoved her empty basket under the bed and went out upon the covered gallery that spanned the garden and led to Madame Lareveillère's bedchamber.

The quadrangle lay half overspread now by shadow. The gay *insouciante* flowers moved gently in an incipient breeze, the umbrella top of the little summer-house warded the rays from the benches beneath, and kept them cool and pleasant. Her own face was not more familiar, more matter-of-fact to Marcélite, and yet she saw in the yard things she had never remarked before. There was a different expression to it all. Flowers, summer-house, even the gray flags, depressed her and made her sad; as if they, or she, were going to die soon. She caught the balustrade in her hand, but it was not vertigo. What was it, then, that made her feel so unnatural and everything so portentous? This morning, life was so comfortable and small, everything just under her hand. She was mistress of every day, and night was the truce, if not the end of all trouble. But to-day had united itself to past and future in such a way that night was but a transparent veil that separated but could not

isolate them one from the other. Time was in revolt against her; her own powers betrayed her; flight was impossible, resistance useless, death, even, futile.

What was the matter with her head, anyhow? She must be *voudoued*. If she could only feel as she did this morning! The slatternly Jeanne shuffled underneath on her way to the bell, an augur of ill-omen. She would go and see Madame Lareveillère.

Madame (as she was commonly called) sat at her *secrétaire* writing. Her pen, fine pointed as a cambric needle, scratched under her fingers as if it worked on steel instead of paper. She was very busy, transferring the names from a list before her into the gilt-edged prize-books piled up in glowing heaps all around her. A strict observer would have noticed many inaccuracies which would have invalidated any claim to correctness on the part of her copy. There were not only liberties taken with the prize itself, but entire names were involved in transactions which the original list by no means warranted. These inaccuracies always occurred after consultation of another list kept in Madame's little drawer,

— a list whose columns carried decimals instead of good and bad marks for lessons. A single ray of light, filtered through various intermedial shades and curtains, had been manœuvred so as to fall on the small desk at a safe distance from Madame's sensitive complexion. At difficult calculations, she would screw up her eyes and peer at both lists brought into the focus of illumination, then would sink back into obscurity for advisory reflection.

There are so many calculations to be made, so many fine distinctions drawn, in a distribution of prizes! No one but a schoolmistress knows the mental effort requisite for the working out of an equation which sets good and bad scholars against good and bad pay. Why could not the rich girls study more, or the poor less? Oh, the simple beauty of strict, injudicious impartiality! Cursed be the inventor or originator of these annual rehearsals, where every one was rewarded except the rewarder!

On occasions like these any interruption is a deliverance; Madame heard with glad alacrity a knock at the door.

"*Ah! c'est toi*, Marcélite!"

Marcélite represented another matter of yearly consideration, another question of paramount importance, a suspensive judgment, involving, however, Madame alone. With the assistance of the hairdresser, many years ago (the date is not essential, and women are sensitive about such things), the principal of the Institut St. Denis had engaged in one of those struggles against Time to which pretty unmarried women seem pledged during a certain period, the fighting age, of their lives. It was purely a defensive struggle on her part, and consisted in a protest against that uglifying process by which women are coaxed into resignation to old age and death. So far, she had maintained her own perfectly; and Time, for all the progress he had made in the sweet, delicate face of Eugénie Lareveillère, might just as well have been tied for ten years past to one of the four posts of the bedstead. The musical concert and distribution of prizes and its consequent indispensable new toilette furnished an excellent date for an annual review and consultation, when old measures were discussed, new ones adopted, and the next campaign planned. Madame, however, did not feel

this year the same buoyant courage, the same irrepressible audacity as heretofore. In fact, there was a vague suspicion in her breast, hitherto unacknowledged, that in spite of facial evidence she herself, *dans son intérieur*, was beginning to grow the least, little, tiny bit old. She felt like capitulating with the enemy, and had almost made up her mind to surrender — her hair. "*L'incertitude est le pire des maux, jusqu'au moment où la réalité nous fait regretter l'incertitude.*" Should the conditions be proven too hard for mortal beauty, she could at least revolt again. Thank heaven! over there in Paris worked devoted emissaries for women, and the last word had not yet been said by the artists of hair-dyes and cosmetics.

"*Eh, bien, qu'en dis-tu,* Marcélite?"

The artistically arranged head, with its curls and puffs and frisettes clustered like brown silken flowers above the fair skin, was directly in the line of Marcélite's vision. Who would have suspected that these were but transplanted exotics from the hot head of foreign youth? that under their adorning luxuriance lay, fastened by inflexible hairpins, the legitimate but deposed

possessors of this crown? But they were old, gray, almost white, and Madame was suggesting for them a temporary and empirical resurrection. That head which daily for years she had moulded according to her comprehension of fashion; that inert little ball for which Marcélite, in her superb physical strength, had almost felt a contempt,—she looked at it now, and, like the flowers in the garden, it was changed to her, was pregnant with subtle, portentous meaning. She was beginning faintly to suspect the truth. All this buzzing, whirling, thought, fear, calculation, retrospection, and prevision, which had come into her great, big, strong head only an hour ago, had been going on in this little, fragile, delicate handful of skull for years, ever since it was born. She saw it now, she knew it,—the difference between Madame's head and hers, between a consciousness limited by eternity and one limited by a nightly sleep, between an intelligence looking into immortality and one looking into the eyes of a confessor.

The room would have been quite dark but for that one useful ray which, after enlightening the path of distributive justice for Madame, fell

on and was absorbed by a picture opposite. Out of the obscurity arose one by one the features of the bedchamber, — the supreme model of bedchambers in the opinion of the impressionable loyalists of St. Denis; a bedchamber, the luxury of which could never be surpassed, the mysterious solemnity never equalled; a bedchamber, in fact, created to satisfy the majestic coquettishness of the autocratic superior of an aristocratic school for girls.

Indistinct, undefined, vâgue fragments of color struggled up through the floor of sombre carpet. The windows, made to exclude the light, were draped with mantles of lace and silk hanging from gigantic, massive, convoluted gilt cornices. The grand four-posted mahogany bedstead, with its rigging of mosquito-netting and cords and tassels, looked like some huge vessel that by accident had lodged in this small harbor. So stupendous, so immeasurable, so gloomily, grandly, majestically imposing, this dark, crimson-housed bedstead looked in the small, dimly-lighted room, that little girls sent on occasional messages to Madame felt a tremor of awe at the sight of it, and understood instinctively, without

need of explanation or elucidation, that here, indeed, was one of those *lits de justice* which caused such dismay in the pages of their French history. The bureau with its laces and ribbons, its cushions, essence-bottles, jewel-cases, *vide-poches*, and little galleried étagères full of gay reflections for the mirror underneath, was as coquettish, as volatile, as petulant an article of furniture as was ever condemned to bedchamber companionship with a *lit de justice*.

The *prie-dieu* in front of the altar granted the occupant an encouraging view into all the visible appliances for stimulating faith in the things not seen. The willing heart, as by an ascending scale, rose insensibly from the humanity to the divinity of sacrifice and suffering: reliquaries, triply consecrated beads, palms, and crucifixes, pictures of sainted martyrs and martyresses (who contradicted the fallacious coincidence of homeliness and virtue), statuettes, prayer-books, pendent flasks of holy water, and an ecclesiastical flask of still holier liquid, impregnated with miraculous promises. A taper, in a red globe, burned with subdued effulgence below it all. Ghastly white and black bead wreaths, hanging

under faded miniatures, set the bounds of mural consecration, and kept Madame mournfully reminded of her deceased husband and mother.

Marcélite stood, like a threatening idol, in the centre of the room, her eyes glaring through the gloom with fierce doggedness. Her feet were planted firmly apart, her hands doubled up on her high, round, massive hips. The cords of her short, thick neck stood out, and her broad, flexible nostrils rose and fell with passion. Her untamed African blood was in rebellion against the religion and civilization whose symbols were all about her in that dim and stately chamber, — a civilization which had tampered with her brain, had enervated her will, and had duped her with false assurances of her own capability.

She felt a crushing desire to tear down, split, destroy, to surround herself with ruins, to annihilate the miserable little weak devices of intelligence, and reassert the proud supremacy of brute force. She longed to humiliate that meek Virgin Mother ; and if the form on the crucifix had been alive she would have gloated over his blood and agony. She thirsted to get her thin,

taper, steel-like fingers but once more on that pretty, shapely, glossy head.

"*Pauvre petite chatte!* I shall miss her very much; you know, Marcélite, it seems only a year or two since you brought her here a little baby, and now she is a young lady of seventeen. Thirteen years ago! What a *chétive* little thing she was! You were as much of a scholar here then as she; you had to stay with her so much. You have been a faithful nurse to her, *ma bonne femme.* A mother could not have been more devoted, and very few would have done all you have for that child. Ah! that's a thing money can never pay for, — love. I hope Marie will always remember what you have been to her, and repay it with affection. But she will; she is a good girl, — a good, good girl, *pauvre petite!* It is Monsieur Motte, though, who should give you a handsome present, something really valuable. I would like to know what he would have done for a *bonne* for his niece without you. You remember that summer when she had the fever? Eh, well, she would have died but for you; I shall never forget her sad little face and her big black

eyes. You know, her mother must see all that; I can never believe, Marcélite, that a mother cannot come back, sometimes, to see her children, particularly a little girl — "

Marcélite listened with head averted. Her hands had fallen from her hips, her mouth slowly relaxed, and the lips opened moist and red. As if drawn by strains of music, she came nearer and nearer Madame's chair.

" She was always such a quiet little thing, *ma foi!*" Madame's reminiscence was an endless chain. " I used to forget her entirely; but now she is going away, I know I shall miss her, yes, very much. I hope the world will be kind to her. She will be handsome, too, some day, when she does not have to study so hard, and can enjoy the diversions of society a little. By the time she is twenty you will see she will be *une belle femme.* Ah, Monsieur Motte, you will be satisfied, *allez!*"

The little pen commenced scratching away again, and this time registered the deed of prize of French history to *l'élève,* Marie Modeste Motte.

Marcélite, with wistful eyes, listened for some

more of the soft, sweet tones. She made the movement of swallowing two or three times to get the swelling and stiffness out of her throat.

"Mamzelle Marie, too, she will be sorry to leave Madame." Her voice was thick and unsteady.

"Oh no, girls are always glad to quit school. Very naturally, too. When one is young, one does not like to stay indoors and study, when there is so much outside, — dancing, music, beaux." A sigh interrupted Madame. "It is all past for me now, but I can recollect how I felt when I was seventeen. *Apropos*, Marcélite, did you give my invitation to Monsieur Motte?"

"Yes, Madame."

The answer came after an interval of hesitation. At one moment Marcélite's eyes flashed as if she would brave all results and refuse to respond.

"And what did he say?"

"He — he sent his compliments to Madame."

Madame looked around to see what the good-natured *coiffeuse* meant by such sullen tones. "Yes; but did he say he would come to

the concert? I wanted particularly to know that."

"He is so old, Madame."

"*Là, là,* the same old excuse! I am so tired of it."

"But when one is old, Madame."

"Ah, bah! I do not believe he is too old for his own pleasure. I know men; old age is a very convenient excuse at times."

Marcélite appeared to have no reply at the end of her ready tongue.

"But this time he must come, *par exemple!* even if he is so old. I think he might subject himself to some little inconvenience and trouble to see his niece graduate. He has not put himself out much about her for twelve or thirteen years."

"God knows! Madame."

"God knows? *Mais,* Marcélite, how silly you talk! Don't you see that Monsieur Motte must come to-morrow night, at least to take Marie home? God does know, and so should he."

Marcélite spoke as if galvanized by an inspiration. "Perhaps he wants Miss Marie to stay another year, Madame; you see, she is so

young, and — and — there is so much to learn, *enfin*."

"He wants that, does he? he wants that! Ah, *l'égoïste!* That is like a man; oh, I know them, like *a b c*. No, if Marie is not too young to graduate, she is not too young to leave school; and besides, if she had not learned everything, how could she graduate? There is an end to learning, *enfin*. You tell Monsieur Motte that. But no, *tiens*, it is better I shall write it."

She seized some note-paper and put her message in writing with the customary epistolary embellishment of phrase at the expense of sincerity and truth.

"I hope he will be kind to her, and look out for a good *parti* for her. Of course she will have a *dot*, — his only relative. Did you not tell me she was his only relative, Marcélite? He has absolutely no one else besides her?"

"No, Madame."

"Well, then, she will get it all when he dies, unless" — with a shrug — "I do not know; one is never sure about men."

Madame bethought herself of the time, and looked at her watch just as Marcélite, by a sud-

den resolution, made a desperate movement towards her.

"Nearly three o'clock! I must go and make my *tour*. *Au revoir, ma bonne.* Be sure and give Monsieur Motte my note, and come early to-morrow morning; and do not forget to think about what I told you, you know." She tapped her head significantly and left the room. On the short passage to the *Salle des Classes* she put off her natural manner, and assumed the conventional disguise supposed to be more fitting her high position. When the door opened and the little girls started up to drop their courtesies, and their "*Je vous salue, Madame,*" her stately tread and severe mien could hardly have been distinguished from those of her predecessor, the aristocratic old *refugée* from the Island of St. Domingo.

After dinner, when the shadow had entirely enveloped the yard, and the fragrance of the oleander and jasmine had fastened itself on the air, the girls were allowed their evening recreation. Relieved from the more or less restraining presence of the day scholars, the boarders promenaded in the cordial intimacy of

home life. The laughter of the children in the street, the music of the organs (there seemed to be one at each corner), the gay jingle of the ice-cream cart came over the wall to them. To-morrow there would be no wall between them and the world, — the great, gay, big world of New Orleans. The thought was too exhilarating for their fresh blood; they danced to the music and laughed to the laughter outside, they kissed their hands to invisible friends, and made *révérences* and complimentary speeches to the crescent moon up in the blue sky. The future would soon be here now! only to-morrow evening, — the future, which held for them a *début* in society, a box at the opera, beautiful toilettes, balls, dancing, music. No more study, routine, examinations, scoldings, punishments, and bread-and-butter lunches. The very idea of it was intoxicating, and each girl felt guilty of a maudlin effusion of sentiment and nonsense to her best friend. A "best friend" is an institution in every girls' school. Every class-book when opened would direct you to a certain page on which was to be found the name of "*celle que j'aime*," or "*celle que j'adore*," or "*mon amie*

chérie," or "*ma toute devouée.*" The only source of scandal that flourished in their secluded circle was the formation or disrupting of these ties through the intermeddling officiousness of "*rapporteuses*" and "*mauvaises langues.*" But the approaching dissolution of all ties drew them together, each one to each one's best friend, and, as usual, the vows exchanged became more fervent and passionate just before breaking. Marcélite was outside, leaning against the wall. Close over her head hung the pink oleanders through their green leaves, and on their strong perfume was wafted the merry voices of the boarders. How glad, how happy they were! She could hear her *bébé* above the others, and, strange to say, her laughter made her sadder even than her tears to-day. She lifted up her black, passionate face. If she could only see them! if she could look over the wall and catch one more glimpse of the girl whom as a baby she had held to her bosom, and whom she had carried in her arms through that gate when . . . "*Ah, mon Dieu, ayez pitié de moi, pauvre négresse!*"

"*Dansez, chantez,*" they were singing and

making a *ronde*. She heard some one at the gate, — Jeanne, probably, coming out. She turned her back quickly and walked away around the corner, making the tour of the square. When she turned the corner coming the other way, she was quite out of breath with walking so fast; as there was no one in the street, she increased her pace to a run, and reached the oleanders panting; but all was now still inside; the boarders had been summoned to supper. She stretched her arms out and leaned her head against the rough bricks. She turned and looked at the sky; her eyes gleamed through her tears like the hot stars through the blue air. She moved away a few steps, hesitated, returned; then went again, only to be drawn back under the oleanders. She sat down close to the wall, threw her apron over her head, and drew her feet up out of the way of the passers-by.

Daylight found her still there. When the early carts began to pass, laden for the neighboring market, she rose stiff and sore and walked in the direction of the river, where the morning breeze was just beginning to ripple the waters and drive away the fog.

The great day of the concert began very early. Fête days always get up before the sun. The boarders in the dormitory raised their heads from their pillows and listened to the pushing and dragging going on underneath them: the men arranging the chairs for that night. Their heads, done up in white paper *papillotes*, looked like so many blanched porcupines. This was one of the first of those innumerable degrees of preparation by which they expected to transform themselves into houris of loveliness by concert-time. As there can be no beauty without curls, in a schoolgirl's opinion, and as a woman's first duty is to be beautiful, they felt called upon to roll lock after lock of their hair around white paper, which was then twisted to the utmost limit of endurance; and on occasions when tightness of curl is regulated by tightness of twist, endurance may safely be said to have no limits. Fear of the unavoidable ensuing disappointment forced Marie to renounce, reluctantly, beauty in favor of discretion. When her companions saw the omission, they screamed in dismay.

"Oh, Marie!"

"Ah! Why did n't you put your hair up?"

"What a pity!"

"And you won't have curls for this evening?"

"Do it now!"

"*Mais je t'assure*, it will curl almost as tight."

"Let me do it for you, *chère*."

"No, me."

"But it is better to have it a little *frisé*, than straight, so."

Marie, from practice accomplished in excuses, persisted that she had a *migraine*.

"Oh, *la migraine*, poor thing!"

"I implore you, don't be ill to-night."

"Try my *eau de Cologne*."

"No, my *eau sédative* is better."

"Put this on your head."

"Tie this around your neck."

"Carry this in your pocket."

"Some water from Notre Dame de Lourdes."

"Some smelling-salts."

Madame Lareveillère opened *her* eyes that morning as from an unsuccessful experiment. She cared little about sleep as a restorative,

but it was invaluable to her in this emergency as a cosmetic.

Jeanne brought in her morning cup of coffee, with the news that the men had almost finished in the *Salle de Concert.*

"*C'est bon;* tell Marcélite to come as soon as she is ready."

The eyes closed again on the pillow in expectation of speedy interruption. But sleep, the coquette, courted and coaxed in vain all night, came now with blandishment, lullaby, and soft caress, and fastened the already heavy lids down over the brown eyes, and carried the occupant of the big bed away out on pretty dreams of youth and pleasure; away, beyond all distractions, noises, interruptions; beyond the reach of matutinal habits, duties, engagements, rehearsals, prizes; beyond even the practising of the "*Cheval de Bronze*" on four pianos just underneath her. She slept as people sleep only on the field of battle or amid the ruins of broken promises; and thanks to her exalted position, she slept undisturbed.

"*Mais,* come in *donc,* Marcélite!" she exclaimed, as a perseverant knocking at the door

for the past five minutes had the effect of balancing her in a state of uncertain wakefulness. "You are a little early this morning, it seems."

She rubbed her hands very softly over her still-closed eyes; that last dream was so sweet, so clinging, what a pity to open them!

"It is not Marcélite; it is I, — Madame Joubert."

"You! Madame Joubert!"

The excellent, punctilious, cold, austere, inflexible French teacher by her bedside!

"I thought it was Marcélite."

She still was hardly awake.

"No, it is I."

"But what is the matter, Madame Joubert?"

"It is twelve o'clock, Madame."

"Twelve o'clock! Impossible!"

"You hear it ringing, Madame."

"But where is Marcélite?"

"Marcélite did not come this morning."

"Marcélite did not come this morning!" She was again going to say "Impossible!" but she perceived Madame Joubert's head, and was silent.

Instead of her characteristic, formal, but conventionally fashionable coiffure, Madame Joubert had returned to, or assumed, that most primitive and innocent way of combing her hair, called *la sauvagesse.* Unrelieved by the soft perspective of Marcélite's handiwork, her plain, prominent features stood out with the savage boldness of rocks on a shrubless beach. "How frightfully ugly!" thought Madame Lareveillère.

"Marcélite did not come this morning? Why?"

"How should I know, Madame?"

"She must be ill; send Jeanne to see."

"I did that, Madame, five hours ago; she was not in her room."

"But what can have become of her?"

Madame Joubert had early in life eliminated the consideration of supposititious cases from the catalogue of her salaried duties; but she answered gratuitously, —

"I cannot imagine, Madame."

"But I must have some one to comb my hair."

"The music-teacher is waiting for you. The

French professor says he will be here again in a half-hour; he has been here twice already. Madame Criard says that it is indispensable for her to consult you about the choruses."

"*Mais, mon Dieu!* Madame Joubert, I must have a hairdresser!"

Madame Joubert waived all participation in this responsibility by continuing her communication.

"The girls are all very tired; they say they will be worn out by to-night if they are kept much longer. *They* have been up ever since six o'clock."

"I know, I know, Madame Joubert; it was an accident. I also was awake at six o'clock. *J'ai fait la nuit blanche.* Then I fell asleep again. Ah! that miserable Marcélite! I beg of you, tell Jeanne to go for some one, no matter whom — Henriette, Julie, Artémise. I shall be ready in a moment."

In a surprisingly short while she was quite ready, all but her hair, and stood in her white muslin peignoir, tied with blue ribbons, before her toilette, waiting impatiently for some one to come to her assistance.

How terrible it is not to be able to comb one's own hair! Her hands had grown completely unaccustomed to the exercise of the comb and brush.

"Madame," said Jeanne at the door, "I have been everywhere. I cannot find a hairdresser at home; I have left word at several places, and Madame Joubert says they are waiting for you."

What could she do? She looked in the glass at her gray, spare locks; she looked on her toilette at her beautiful brown curls and plaits. "How in the world did Marcélite manage to secure all *that* on *this?*"

There was a knock at the door.

"Perhaps that was a hairdresser!" She hastened to unfasten it.

"Madame," said a little girl, trying to speak distinctly, despite a nervous shortness of breath, "Madame Joubert sent me to tell you they were waiting."

"Very well, *mon enfant*, very well. I am coming."

"I shall be a greater fright than Madame Joubert," she murmured to herself.

The drops of perspiration disfiguring the clear tissue of the muslin peignoir were the only visible results of her conscientious efforts.

"I will never be able to fix my hair."

There was another knock at the door, another "Madame Joubert *vous fait dire*," etc.

"Tell Madame Joubert I am coming in a moment."

How impatient Madame Joubert was this morning. Oh for Marcélite!

She knew nothing about hair, that was evident; but she remembered that she knew something about lace. Under the pressure of accelerating summonses from Madame Joubert, she fashioned a fichu, left on a chair from last night, into a very presentable substitute for curls and puffs.

"*Mais ce n'est pas mal, en effet*," she muttered. Hearing the sound of footsteps again in the corridor, she rushed from the mirror and met the messenger just as her hand was poised to give a knock at the door. The "*Sa . . . lu . . . t! mois de va . . . can . . . ces!*" and the "*Vi . . . er . . . ge, Ma . . . ri . . . e*" had been chorused and re-chorused; the "*Cheval de Bronze*" had been hammered into durable

perfection; the solos and duos, dialogues and scenes, the salutatory and valedictory had been rehearsed *ad nauseam*.

Madame finally dismissed the tired actors, with the recommendation to collect all their *petites affaires*, so that their trunks could be sent away very early the next morning.

"I suppose Marcélite will be sure to come this evening?" she asked Madame Joubert.

"Oh, *that* is sure, Madame," Madame Joubert replied, as if this were one of the few rules of life without exceptions; and Madame Lareveillère believed her as confidently as if Noël and Chapsal had passed upon her answer, and the *Dictionnaire de l'Académie* had indorsed it.

The girls scattered themselves all over the school, effacing with cheerful industry every trace of their passage through the desert of education. "*Dieu merci! that* was all past." Marie had emptied her desk of everything belonging to her except her name, dug out of the black lid with a dull knife. That had to remain, with a good many other Marie Modeste Mottes on the different desks that had harbored her books during her sojourn in the various classes. This

was all that would be left of her in the rooms where she had passed thirteen years of her life. The vacant teacher's desk, the throne of so many tyrants (the English teachers were all hateful!); the white walls with their ugly protecting dado of black; the rows of pegs, where the hats and cloaks hung; the white marble mantel, with its carving of naked cherubs, which the stove had discreetly clothed in soot,— she could never forget them. Sitting in her future home, the house of her uncle, she knew that these homely objects would come to her memory, as through sunset clouds of rose and gold.

"What will you do when you quit school, Marie?" her companions would ask, after detailing with ostentatious prolixity their own pleasant prospects.

"Ah, you know that depends entirely upon my uncle," she would reply, shrugging her thin shoulders under her calico waist.

This rich old uncle, an obstinate recluse, was the traditional *le vieux* of the school.

"How is *le vieux* to-day?" they would call to Marcélite.

"Give my love to *le vieux*."

"*Dis donc*, why does n't *le vieux* take Marie away in the summer?"

"Did you see the beautiful *étrennes le vieux* has sent Marie?"

"They say he has sent her a superb toilette for the exhibition, made at Madame Treize's, and white satin boots."

Her trunk had been brought down with the others, and placed at her bedside. What more credible witness than a coffin or a trunk? It stood there as it might have stood thirteen years ago, when her baby wardrobe was unpacked. Her dear, ugly, little, old trunk! It had belonged to her mother, and bore three faded M's on its leather skin. She leaned her head against the top as she knelt on the floor before it to pack her books. How much that trunk could tell her if it could only speak! If she were as old as that trunk, she would have known a father, a mother, and a home! She wrinkled her forehead in a concentrated effort to think a little farther back; to push her memory just a little, — a little beyond that mist out of which it arose. In vain! The big bell at the

gate, with its clanging orders, remained the boundary of consciousness.

And Marcélite did not come, not even when the lamps were lighted, to comb their hair, fasten their dresses, and tie their sashes; did not even come at the very end to see how their toilettes became them. The young ladies had waited until the last moment, dressed to the last pin, taken their hair out of the last *papillote*, and then looked at one another in despair, indignation, and grief.

"Just look at my head, I ask you!"

"But mine is worse than yours."

"I shall never be able to do anything with mine."

"The more I brush, the more like a *nègre* I look."

"Ah, Marie, how wise you were not to put your hair in *papillotes!*"

"And all that trouble for nothing, *hein!*"

"And the pain."

"I did n't sleep a wink last night."

"See how nice Marie looks with her hair smoothly plaited."

"I will never forgive Marcélite."

"Nor I."

"Nor I."

"Nor I."

Marie's heart sank when she thought how difficult it would be for Marcélite to efface this disappointment from the remembrance of her clients; and she felt guilty, as being in a measure responsible for it all. Marcélite was evidently detained, or prevented from coming, by preparations for Marie's return. Who knows? — perhaps the eccentric old uncle had something to do with it! Madame Joubert positively refused to mitigate the injury or condone the offence by the employment of another hairdresser. As she had commenced, so she closed the day *à la sauvagesse;* and so she determined to wear her hair to the end of her life, maintaining, logically, that what one hairdresser had done, all were liable to do; life should never serve this disappointment to her a second time: she would employ no more of them.

The being deserted in a critical moment by a trusted servitor, dropped without warning by a confidante, left with an indifference, which amounted to heartlessness, to the prying eyes

and gossiping tongue of a stranger, — this, not the mere trivial combing, was what isolated and distinguished Madame Lareveillère in her affliction. The question had been lifted beyond material consequences. Morally, it approached tragic seriousness. Marcélite would naturally have suggested, whether she thought so or not, that the color of the new gray moire-antique was a trifle *ingrate*, and Madame at least might have had the merit of declining propitiatory compromises between it and her complexion. . . . Julie was an idiot, there was no doubt about that; and the length of her tongue was notorious. By to-morrow evening the delicate mysteries of the youthful-looking Madame Lareveillère's toilette would be unveiled to satisfy the sensational cravings of her malicious patronesses.

The young ladies were placed on a high platform of steps, and rose tier above tier like flowers in a horticultural show, — the upper classes at the top and the best-looking girls well in the centre, as if the product of their beauty as well as their study went to the credit of the institute. When anything particular

arrested their attention they whispered behind their fans, and it was as if a hive of bees had been let loose; when they laughed it was like a cascade rippling from step to step; when they opened their white, blue, and rose-colored fans (school-girls always do the same thing at the same time) and fluttered them, then it was like a cloud of butterflies hovering and coquetting about their own lips.

The *Externes* were radiant in toilettes unmarred by accident or omission; the flattering compliments of their mirrors at home had turned their heads in the direction of perfect self-content. Resignation was the only equivalent the unfortunate *Internes* could offer in extenuation of the unfinished appearance of their heads.

"*Mais, dis donc, chère,* what is the matter with your hair?"

"Marcélite did not come."

"Why, *doudouce,* how could you allow your hair to be combed that way?"

"Marcélite did not come."

"*Chérie,* I think your hair is curled a little tight this evening."

"I should think so; that *diable* Marcélite did not come."

"*Mon Dieu*, look at Madame Joubert *à la sauvagesse!*"

"And Madame *à la grand maman!*"

"Marcélite did not come, you see."

Not only was the room filled, but an eager audience crowded the yard and peeped in through the windows. The stairways, of course, were filled with the colored servants, an enthusiastic, irrepressible *claque*. When it was all over, and the last *bis* and *encore* had subsided, row after row of girls was gleaned by the parents, proud possessors of such shawlfuls of beauty, talent, and prizes. Marie's class, the last to leave, were picked off one by one. She helped the others to put on their wraps, gather up their prizes, and kissed one after another good-by.

Each man that came up was, by a glance, measured and compared with her imaginary standard. "He is too young." "He is too fat." "I hope he is not that cross-looking one." "Maybe it is he." "What a funny little one that is!" "Ah, he is very nice-look-

ing!" "Is it he?" "No, he is Corinne's father." "I feel sure he is that ugly, disagreeable one." "Ah, here he is at last! at last!" "No; he only came to say good-night to Madame." "He is afraid of the crowd." "He is waiting outside." "He is at the gate in a carriage." "After all, he has only sent Marcélite." "I saw her here on the steps a while ago." She looked at the steps, they were deserted. There was but one person left in the room besides herself; Madame and her suite had gone to partake of their yearly exhibitional refreshments, — lemonade and *masse-pain*, served in the little parlor. Her uncle must be that man. The person walked out after finding a fan he had returned to seek.

She remained standing so by the piano a long while, her gold crown on her head, her prizes in her arms, and a light shawl she had thoughtfully provided to wear home. Home! She looked all around very slowly once more. She heard Jeanne crossing the yard, but before the servant could enter the door, the white muslin dress, blue sash, and satin boots had bounded into the darkness of the stairway. The white-

veiled beds which the night before had nestled the gay *papillotted* heads were deserted and silent in the darkness. What a shelter the darkness was! She caught hold of the bedpost, not thinking, but feeling. Then Madame Joubert came tripping across the gallery with a candle, on her way to bed. The prizes and shawl dropped to the floor, and Marie crouched down close behind the bar. "Oh, God," she prayed, "keep her from seeing me!" The teacher after a pause of reflection passed on to her room; the child on the floor gave herself up to the full grief of a disappointment which was not childish in its bitterness. The events of the evening kept slipping away from her while the contents of her previous life were poured out with never-ending detail, and as they lay there, before and all around her, she saw for the first time how bare, how denuded, of pleasure and comfort it had been. What had her weak little body not endured in patient ignorance? But the others were not ignorant,—the teachers, Marcélite, her uncle! How had they imposed upon the orphan in their hands! She saw it now, and she felt a woman's indigna-

tion and pity over it. The maternal instinct in her bosom was roused by the contemplation of her own infancy. "Marcélite! Marcélite!" she called out, "how could you? for you knew, you knew it all!" The thought of a mother compelled to leave her baby on such an earth, the betrayal of the confidence of her own mother by her uncle, drew the first tears from her eyes. She leaned her head against the side of her bed and wept, not for herself, but for all women and all orphans. Her hand fell on the lace of her dress, and she could not recall at first what it was. She bounded up, and with eager, trembling fingers tearing open the fastenings, she threw the grotesque masquerade, boots and all, far from her on the floor, and stood clasping her naked arms over her panting breast; she had forgotten the gilt wreath on her head. "If she could die then and there! that would hurt her uncle who cared so little for her, Marcélite who had deserted her!" Living she had no one, but dead, she felt she had a mother. Before getting into bed, she mechanically fell on her knees, and her lips repeated the formula of a prayer, an uncorrected, rude tradition of her

baby days, belonging to the other side of her memory. It consisted of one simple petition for her own welfare, but the blessings of peace, prosperity, and eternal salvation of her uncle and Marcélite were insisted upon with pious determination.

"I know I shall not sleep, I cannot sleep." Even with the words she sank into the oblivion of tired nature at seventeen years; an oblivion which blotted out everything, — toilette, prizes scattered on the floor, graduation, disappointment, and discomfort from the gilt-paper crown still encircling her black plaits.

"Has Marcélite come?" demanded Madame, before she tasted her coffee.

"Not yet, Madame."

"I wonder what has become of her?"

Jeanne sniffed a volume of unspeakable probabilities.

"Well, then, I will not have that *sotte* Julie; tell her so when she comes. I would rather dress myself."

"Will Madame take her breakfast alone, or with Madame Joubert?"

The pleasure of vacation was tempered by the companionship of Madame Joubert at her daily meals, — a presence imposed by that stern tyrant, common courtesy.

"Not to-day, Jeanne; tell Madame Joubert I have *la migraine*. I shall eat breakfast alone."

"And Mamzelle Marie Modeste?"

"Marie Modeste!"

"Yes, Madame; where must she take her breakfast?"

The Gasconne's eyes flamed suddenly from under her red lashes and her voice ventured on its normal loud tones in these sacred precincts.

"It's a shame of that negress! She ought to be punished well for it, too, ha! Not to come for that poor young lady last night; to leave her in that big dormitory all by herself; and all the other young ladies to go home and have their pleasure, and she all by herself, just because she is an orphan. You think she does n't feel that, *hein?* If I had known it I would have helped her undress, and stayed with her, too; I would have slept on the floor, — a delicate little nervous thing like that; and a great, big, fat, lazy, good-for-nothing quadroon like Mar-

célite. *Mais c'est infâme!* It is enough to give her *des crises*. Oh, I would not have done that! *tenez*, not to go back to France would I have done that. And when I got up this morning, and saw her sitting in the arbor, so pale, I was frightened myself — I — "

"What is all this you are telling me? Jeanne, Jeanne, go immediately; run, I tell you — run and fetch that poor child here. *Ah, mon Dieu!* egoist that I am to forget her! *Pauvre petite chatte!* What must she think of me?"

She jumped out of bed, threw on a wrapper, and waited at the door, peeping out.

"*Ma fille;* I did not know — Jeanne has just told me."

The pale little figure made an effort to answer with the old pride and indifference.

"It seems my uncle — "

"*Mais qu'est-ce que c'est donc, mon enfant?* Do not cry so! What is one night more in your old school? It is all my fault; the idea that I should forget you, — leave you all alone while we were enjoying our lemonade and *masse-pain!* But why did you not come to me? Oh! oh! if you cry so, I shall think you are sorry not to

leave me; besides, it will spoil your pretty eyes."

"If Marcélite had only come — "

"Ah, my dear! do not speak of her! do not mention her name to me. We are *quittes* from this day; you hear me? We are *quittes*. But Marie, my child, you will make yourself ill if you cry so. Really, you must try and compose yourself. What is it that troubles you so? Come here, come sit by me; let me confess you. I shall play that I am your *maman*. There, there, put your head here, my *bébé*, so. Oh, I know how you feel. I have known what disappointment was; but *enfin*, my child, that will all pass; and one day, when you are old and gray-headed like me, you will laugh well over it."

The tender words, the caresses, the enfolding arms, the tears that she saw standing in the august schoolmistress's eyes, the sympathetic movement of the soft, warm bosom, — her idea of a mother was not a vain imagining. This was it; this was what she had longed for all her life. And she did confess to her, — confessed it all, from the first childish trouble to the last disappointment. Oh, the delicious relief of

complete, entire confession to a sympathetic ear!

The noble heart of Madame, which had frittered itself away over puny distributions of prizes and deceiving cosmetics, beat young, fresh, and impulsive as in the days when the gray hairs were *chatains clair*, and the cheeks bloomed natural roses. Tears fell from her eyes on the little black head lying so truthful, so confiding on her bosom. *Grand Dieu!* and they had been living thirteen years under the same roof, — the poor, insignificant, abandoned, suffering little Marie, and the gay, beautiful, rich, envied Madame Lareveillère! This was their first moment of confidence. Would God ever forgive her? Could she ever forgive herself? How good it feels to have a child in your arms! so. She went to the stand by her bed and filled a small gilded glass with *eau des carmes* and water.

"There, drink that, my child; it will compose you. I must make my toilette; it is breakfast-time. You see, *ma fille*, this is a lesson. You must not expect too much of the men; they are not like us. Oh, I know them well. They are all *égoïstes*. They take a great deal of trouble

for you when you do not want it, if it suits them; and then they refuse to raise their little finger for you, though you get down on your knees to them. Now, there 's your uncle. You see he has sent you to the best and most expensive school in the city, and he has dressed you well, — oh, yes, very well; look at your toilette last night! real lace; I remarked it. Yet he would not come for you and take you home, and spare you this disappointment. I wrote him a note myself and sent it by Marcélite."

"He *is* old, Madame," said Marie, loyally.

"Ah, bah! *Plus les hommes sont vieux plus ils sont méchants.* Oh, I have done that so often; I said, 'If you do not do this, I will not do that.' And what was the result? They did not do this, and I had *tout simplement et bonnement* to do that. I write to Monsieur Motte, 'Your niece shall not leave the Pension until you come for her;' he does not come, and I take her to him. *Voilà la politique féminine.*"

After breakfast, when they had dressed, bonneted, and gloved themselves, Madame said, —

"*Ma foi!* I do not even know where the

old Diogène lives. Do you remember the name of the street, Marie?"

"No, Madame; somewhere in the *Faubourg d'en bas.*"

"Ah, well! I must look for it here."

She went to the table and quickly turned over the leaves of a ledger.

"Marie Modeste Motte, niece of Monsieur Motte. *Mais, tiens,* there is no address!"

Marie looked with interest at her name written in red ink.

"No; it is not there."

"*Ah, que je suis bête.* It is in the other one. This one is only for the last ten years. There, *ma fille,* get on a chair; can you reach that one? No, not that, the other one. How warm it is! You look it out for me!"

"I do not see any address here either, Madame."

"Impossible! There must be an address there. True, nothing but Marie Modeste Motte, niece of Monsieur Motte, just like the other one. Now, you see, that's Marcélite again; that's all her fault. It was her duty to give that address thirteen years ago. In thirteen

years she has not had the time to do that!"

They both sat down warm and vexed.

"I shall send Jeanne for her again!"

But Jeanne's zeal had anticipated orders.

"I have already been there, Madame; I beat on her door, I beat on it as hard as I could, and the neighbors opened their windows and said they did n't think she had been there all night."

"Well, then, there is nothing for me to do but send for Monsieur le Notaire! Here, Jeanne; take this note to Monsieur Goupilleau."

All unmarried women, widows or maids, if put to the torture, would reveal some secret, unsuspected sources of advisory assistance, — a subterranean passage for friendship which sometimes offers a retreat into matrimony, — and the last possible wrinkle, the last resisting gray hair is added to other female burdens at the death of this secret counsellor or the closing up of the hidden passage. Therefore, how dreadful it is for women to be condemned to a life of such logical exactions where a reason is demanded for everything, even for

a *statu quo* affection of fifteen years or more. Madame Lareveillère did not possess courage enough to defy logic, but her imagination and wit could seriously embarrass its conclusions. The *raison d'être* of a Goupilleau in her life had exercised both into athletic proportions.

"An old friend, *ma mignonne;* I look upon him as a father, and he treats me just as if I were his daughter. I go to him as to a confessor. And a great institute like this requires so much advice, — oh, so much! He is very old, — as old as Monsieur Motte himself. We might just as well take off our things; he will not come before evening. You see, he is so discreet, he would not come in the morning for anything in the world. He is just exactly like a father, I assure you, and very, very old."

The graduate and young lady of a day sat in the rocking-chair, quiet, almost happy. She was not in the home she had looked forward to; but Madame's tenderness, the beautiful room in its soothing twilight, and the patronizing majesty of the *lit de justice* made this a very pleasant abiding place in her journey, — the journey so long and so difficult from school

to her real home, from girlhood to real young ladyhood. It was nearly two days now since she had seen Marcélite. How she longed for her, and what a scolding she intended to give her when she arrived at her uncle's, where, of course, Marcélite was waiting for her. How silly she had acted about the address! But, after all, procrastination is so natural. As for Madame, Marie smiled as she thought how easily a reconciliation could be effected between them, *quittes* though they were.

It is hard to wean young hearts from hoping and planning; they will do it in the very presence of the angel of death, and with their shrouds in full view.

Monsieur Goupilleau came: a Frenchman of small stature but large head. He had the eyes of a poet and the smile of a woman.

The prelude of compliments, the tentative flourish to determine in which key the ensuing variation on their little romance should be played, was omitted. Madame came brusquely to the *motif*, not personal to either of them.

"Monsieur Goupilleau, I take pleasure in presenting you to Mademoiselle Marie Motte,

one of our young lady graduates. *Mon ami*, we are in the greatest trouble imaginable. Just imagine, Monsieur Motte, the uncle of mademoiselle could not come for her last night to take her home. He is so old and infirm," added Madame, considerately; "so you see mademoiselle could not leave last night: I want to take her home myself — a great pleasure it is, and not a trouble, I assure you, Marie — but we do not know where he lives."

"Ah! you have not his address."

"No, it should be in the ledger; but an accident, — in fact, the laziness of her *bonne*, who never brought it, not once in thirteen years."

"Her *bonne?*"

"Yes, her *bonne* Marcélite; you know Marcélite *la coiffeuse;* what, you do not know Marcélite, that great, fat — "

"Does Marcélite know where he lives?"

"But of course, my friend, Marcélite knows, she goes there every day."

"Well, send for Marcélite."

"Send for Marcélite! but I have sent for Marcélite at least a dozen times! she is never

at her room. Marcélite! ha! my friend, I am done with Marcélite. What do you think? After combing my hair for fifteen years! — fifteen years, I tell you — she did not come yesterday at all, not once; and the concert at night! You should have seen our heads last night! we were frights — frights, I assure you!"

It was a poetical license, but the eyes of Monsieur Goupilleau disclaimed any such possibility for the head before him.

"Does not mademoiselle know the address of her uncle?"

"Ah, *that*, no. Mademoiselle has been a *pensionnaire* at the Institut St. Denis for thirteen years, and she has never been anywhere except to church; she has seen no one without a chaperon; she has received no letter that has not passed through Madame Joubert's hands. Ah! for that I am particular, and it was Monsieur Motte himself who requested it."

"Then you need a directory."

"A what?"

"A directory."

"But what is that, — a directory?"

"It's a volume, Madame, a book contain-

ing the addresses of all the residents of the city."

"*Quelle bonne idée!* If I had only known that! I shall buy one. Jeanne! Jeanne! run quick, *ma bonne*, to Morel's and buy me a directory."

"Pardon, Madame, I think it would be quicker to send to Bâle's, the *pharmacien* at the corner, and borrow one. Here, Jeanne, take my card."

"*A la bonne heure!* now we shall find our affair."

But the M's, which started so many names in the directory, were perfectly innocent of any combination applicable to an old uncle by the name of Motte.

"You see, your directory is no better than my books!"

Monsieur Goupilleau looked mortified, and shrugged his shoulders.

"He must live outside the city limits, Madame."

"Marcélite always said, 'in the *Faubourg d'en bas*.'"

Jeanne interrupted stolidly: "Monsieur Bâle

told me to bring the book right back; it is against his rules to lend it out of his store."

"Here, take it! take it! Tell him I am infinitely obliged. It was of no use, any way. Ah, *les hommes!*"

"Madame," began Monsieur Goupilleau in precautionary deprecation.

A sudden noise outside, — apparently an assault at the front door; a violent struggle in the antechamber!

"*Grand Dieu!* what can that be!" Madame's lips opened for a shrill *Au secours! Voleurs!* but seeing the notary rush to the door, she held him fast with her two little white hands on his arm.

"*Mon ami*, I implore you!"

The first recognition; the first expression of a fifteen years' secret affection! The first thrill (old as he was) of his first passion! But danger called him outside; he unloosed the hands and opened the door.

A heavy body propelled by Jeanne's strong hands fell on the floor of the room, accompanied by a shower of leaves from Monsieur Bâle's directory.

"*Misérable! Infâme! Effrontée!* Ah, I have caught you! *Scélérate!*"

"Marcélite!"

"Marcélite!"

"Marcélite?"

"Sneaking outside the gate! Like an animal! like a thief! like a dog! Ha! I caught you well!"

The powerful arms seemed ready again to crush the unresisting form rising from the floor.

"Jeanne! hush! How dare you speak to Marcélite like that? Oh, *ma bonne*, what is the matter with you?"

Shaking, trembling, she cowered before them silent.

"Ah! she did n't expect me, *la fière négresse!* Just look at her!"

They did, in painful, questioning surprise. Was this their own clean, neat, brave, honest, handsome Marcélite, — this panting, tottering, bedraggled wretch before them, threatening to fall on the floor again, not daring to raise even her eyes?

"Marcélite! Marcélite! who has done this to you! Tell me, tell your *bébé*, Marcélite."

"Is she drunk?" whispered Madame to the notary.

Her *tignon* had been dragged from her head. Her calico dress, torn and defaced, showed her skin in naked streaks. Her black woolly hair, always so carefully packed away under her head-kerchief, stood in grotesque masses around her face, scratched and bleeding like her exposed bosom. She jerked herself violently away from Marie's clasp.

"Send them away! Send them away!" she at last said to Monsieur Goupilleau, in a low, unnatural voice. "I will talk to you, but send them all away."

Madame and Marie immediately obeyed his look; but outside the door Marie stopped firmly.

"Madame, Marcélite can have nothing to say which I should not hear —"

"Hush —" Madame put her finger to her lips; the door was still a little open and the voices came to them.

Marcélite, from the corner of her bleared eyes, watched them retire, and then with a great heave of her naked chest she threw herself on the floor at the notary's feet.

"Master! Oh master! Help me!"

All the suffering and pathos of a woman's heart were in the tones, all the weakness, dependence, and abandonment in the words.

The notary started at the unexpected appeal. His humanity, his manhood, his chivalry, answered it.

"*Ma fille*, speak; what can I do for you?"

He bent over her as she lay before him, and put his thin, white, wrinkled hand on her shoulder, where it had burst through her dress. His low voice promised the willing devotion of a saviour.

"But don't tell my *bébé*, don't let her know. My God! it will kill her! She 's got no uncle — no Monsieur Motte! It was all a lie. It was me, — me a nigger, that sent her to school and paid for her —"

"You! Marcélite! You!"

Marcélite jumped up and tried to escape from the room. Monsieur Goupilleau quickly advanced before her to the door.

"You fooled me! It was you fooled me!" she screamed to Madame. "God will never forgive you for that! My *bébé* has heard it all!"

Marie clung to her; Monsieur Goupilleau caught her by the arm.

"Marcélite! It was you, — you who sent me to school, who paid for me! And I have no uncle?"

Marcélite looked at the notary, — a prayer for help. The girl fell in a chair and hid her face in her hands.

"Oh, my God! I knew it would kill her! I knew it would! To be supported by a nigger!" She knelt by the chair. "Speak to me, Mamzelle Marie. Speak to me just once! Pardon me, my little mistress! Pardon me! I did not know what I was doing; I am only a fool nigger, anyhow! I wanted you to go to the finest school with ladies, and — and — oh! my *bébé* won't speak to me; she won't even look at me."

Marie raised her head, put both hands on the nurse's shoulders, and looked her straight in the eyes.

"And that also was all a lie about" — she sank her trembling voice — "about my mother?"

"That a lie! That a lie! 'Fore God in heaven, that was the truth; I swear it. I will

kiss the crucifix. What do you take me for, Mamzelle Marie? Tell a lie about — "

Marie fell back in the chair with a despairing cry.

" I cannot believe any of it."

" Monsieur! Madame! I swear to you it 's the truth! God in heaven knows it is. I would n't lie about that, — about my poor dead young mistress. Monsieur! Madame! tell Miss Marie for me; can't you believe me?" She shrieked in desperation to Monsieur Goupilleau.

He came to her unhesitatingly. " I believe you, Marcélite." He put his hand again on her shoulder; his voice faltered, " Poor Marcélite!"

" God bless you, master! God bless you for that. Let me tell you; you believe me when my *bébé* won't. My young mistress, she died; my young master, he had been killed in the war. My young mistress was all alone by herself, with nobody but me, and I did n't take her poor little baby out of her arms till she was dead, as she told me. *Mon bébé, mon bébé!* don't you know that 's the truth? Can't you feel that 's the truth? You see that; she will never speak to me again. I knew it; I told you

so. I heard her last night, in that big room, all by herself, crying for Marcélite. Marcélite! my God! I was afraid to go to her, and I was just under a bed; you think that did n't 'most kill me?" She hid her face in her arms, and swayed her body back and forth.

"Marcélite," said Monsieur Goupilleau. The voice of the champion trembled, and his eyes glistened with tears at the distress he had pledged himself to relieve. "Marcélite, I believe you, my poor woman; I believe you. Tell me the name of the lady, the mother of Mademoiselle."

"Ha! her name! I am not ashamed to tell her name before anybody. Her name! I will tell you her name." She sprang to her feet. "You ask anybody from the Paroisse St. Jacques if they ever heard the name of Mamzelle Marie Modeste Viel and Monsieur Alphonse Motte. That was the name of her mother and her father, and I am not ashamed of it that I should n't tell, ha! Yes, and I am Marcélite Gaulois, and when my mother was sold out the parish, who took me and brought me up, and made me sleep on the foot of her bed, and fed me like her own baby, *hein?* Mamzelle Marie Viel's mother, and Mam-

zelle was the other baby; and she nursed us like twins, *hein?* You ask anybody from the Paroisse St. Jacques. They know; they can tell you."

Marie stood up.

"Come, Marcélite, let us go. Madame, Monsieur —" She evidently struggled to say something else, but she only reiterated, "I must go; we must go; come, Marcélite, let us go."

No one would have remarked now that her eyes were too old for her face.

"Go? My Lord! Where have you *got* to go to?"

"I want to go home to Marcélite; I want to go away with her; come, Marcélite, let us go. Oh! don't you all see I can't stay here any longer? Let me go! Let me go!"

"Go with me! Go to my home! A white young lady like you go live with a nigger like me!"

"Come, Marcélite; please come; go with me; I don't want to stay here."

"You stand there! You hear that! Monsieur! Madame! You hear that!"

"Marcélite, I want to go with you; I want to live with you; I am not too good for that."

"What! You don't think you ain't white! Oh, God! Strike me dead!"

She raised her naked arms over her head, imploring destruction.

"Marcélite, *ma fille*, do not forget, I have promised to help you. Marcélite, only listen to me a moment. Mademoiselle, do not fear; Mademoiselle shall not leave us. I shall protect her; I shall be a father to her —"

"And I," said Madame, drawing Marie still closer to her, — "I shall be her mother."

"Now, try, Marcélite," continued Monsieur Goupilleau, — "try to remember somebody, anybody who knows you, who knew your mistress; I want their names. Anybody, anybody will do, my poor Marcélite! Indeed, I believe you; we all believe you; we know you are telling the truth; but is there not a person, even a book, a piece of paper, anything, you can remember?"

He stood close to her; his head did not reach above her shoulders, but his eyes plead into her face as if petitioning for his own honor; and then they followed the hands of the woman fumbling, feeling, passing, repassing inside her torn dress-waist. He held his hands out, — the

kind tender little hands that had rested so gently on her bruised black skin.

"If I have not lost it, if I have not dropped it out of my gown since last night — I never have dropped it, and I have carried it round inside my body now for seventeen years; but I was 'most crazy last night — "

She put a small package all wrapped up in an old bandanna handkerchief in his hands.

"I was keeping that for my *bébé;* I was going to give it to her when she graduated, just to remind her of her own mother. She gave it to me when she died."

It was only a little worn-out prayer-book, but all filled with written papers and locks of hair and dates and certificates, — frail fluttering scraps that dropped all over the table, but unanswerable champions for the honor of dead men and the purity of dead women.

"*Par la grâce de Dieu!*" exclaimed the notary, while the tears fell from his eyes on the precious relics, discolored and worn from bodily contact. Marie sank on her knees by the table, holding Marcélite tight by the hand.

"*Par la grâce de Dieu!* Nothing is wanting

here, — nothing, nothing except the forgiveness of this good woman, and the assurances of our love and gratitude. And they say," turning to Madame, he hazarded the bold step of taking both her hands in his, — "they say," recollecting the tender pressure on his arm, he ventured still further, — "they say, Eugénie, that the days of heroism are past, and they laugh at our romance!"

And then the vacation again, the midsummer pause in life. The sun increasing its measure and degree of heat day by day, overassessing the cooling powers of the night; and quietness settling itself more and more fixedly in the schoolrooms and yard, which seemed to grow larger and larger, increasing their space with their emptiness. The hard-worked pianos stood mute in their little cells. The great gate remained locked and bolted, only the little door swinging open at irregular intervals to admit some extra industrious or extra ignorant little mind coming to "make a class," as she called it, with Madame Joubert, always ready to lead a forlorn hope against participles or fractions.

Marie Modeste knew the summer vacation better than any lesson she had learned in the St. Denis. There were no new pages in it for her. It had always contained the same old days sent over and over again, as if there were no need to vary a routine which, bringing rest and silence, brought a never-palling treat to the Institute. The naked beds in the dormitory, the white *peignoirs* of Madame Joubert's ungraceful *déshabille*, the muslins and novels of Madame Lareveillère, her own relaxed efforts for comfort and coolness, — it all might have been any one of the lived-out summers behind her. There was no missing detail of the past in the present. But for the future, — looking for it there was no future. Where it had been, the girl saw only a blank space, or a world thick with strangers, aliens. Was there then no living person among them all to hold her, to connect her, with humanity? Was she only a waif, a vestige? Was there then no house for her feet to enter seeking a home, no home holding a welcoming host for her, — not even a cold, misanthropic, selfish, ungracious old uncle; only tombs, and the incommunicable dead?

The mornings and evenings, the whole life she had filled out in imagination, — was it all a mirage? And her studies, had they been learned only for herself? Ah! she had had hard feelings against her uncle at times; she had secretly cried at nights about him; she had been ashamed of him; she had abused him to Marcélite; she had even written, in passionate moments, wild letters of expostulation to him; but she had loved him through it all, — *le vieux*. However illy he had treated her, he had nevertheless represented her family to her. All her efforts had been made to please him some day, all her hopes cherished subject to his approval. Were he a thousand times worse than her loyalty had ever permitted the accusation, he were a benefaction to her now; for he had not gone out of existence alone, — he had taken her world, her home, her family, her nurse, her friend, her almost mother, with him. Where was the Marcélite of months and years gone by? Who was this wretched substitute crouching, cringing, trembling before her, unnaturally, unrecognizably?

The quadroon, unmasked, stripped of dis-

guise, had indeed lost her nerve and audacity. Her brave personation was over. As Marcélite, there was nothing to accomplish except the part of a faithful servant. As Monsieur Motte, what could she not do? If she could only have created him out of her own death! If she could only have made what she had so happily invented! If she could only have prolonged indefinitely the undisturbed confidence and trust which had existed between Marie Modeste and herself! Her old volubility was gone. Whatever she said, lay under one vast suspicion. She could not meet the eyes of Marie Modeste; she could not even hold up her head before Jeanne. She began to reproach God, and vaguely to rebel against the shadow on her skin as casting the shadow on her life.

"Oh, my *bébé!* my little mistress! it's your nurse, it's your own negro who loves you, who would die for you!" — words which took the place of her prayers, her thoughts; her lips were always moving under them. She would undo her kerchief and put her hand where once the little face lay like a white magnolia against the dark skin, and go to sleep so. The place

craved and ached so at times that she put plasters on it, and wore consecrated amulets over it. Her love, which had always been unscrupulous, became in her distress ferocious, insatiable; and she would rush to Madame Lareveillère, and like some wild animal that cannot tell its pain would shed mute tears and utter inarticulate moans.

"Frankly," said Madame to Monsieur Goupilleau, who came now in vacation regularly with the evening shades, as if to meet them on her gallery by appointment, "he will kill us all, — that old man! I can never forgive him for not having lived; but it is in accordance with his character," shrugging her shoulders. "What a monster of selfishness! I have been thinking, — ah, you do not know what my life is here with those two, Marie and Marcélite! — I have been thinking that perhaps I would accept Aurore Angely's invitation. She writes me every year to come on a visit to her plantation for a month or two. What do you say, eh? There is only one objection, — it is in the country. If it were only in the city; but the country, — *dame!* I have always held the country in horror. It

is years since I have seen Aurore and Félix. Ah! he is a torpedo for you! exploding at a touch. Poor little thing! She has never been to the country, never even seen it!" continuing, after a pause unbroken by her friend. The consultations with Monsieur Goupilleau generally took the form of a monologue on her part. "I thought of course her old uncle would take her somewhere this summer, and introduce her to society next winter, and marry her to some good *parti*. It is barbarous, — the disappointment; it is positively a massacre!"

If the notary did not speak, it was not because he had nothing to suggest or propose; on the contrary, he was far advanced into the next winter with his plans, which defined themselves as if by enchantment under the low flexible voice of the lady.

"You see, my friend, a disappointment cracks us all, — us women, — as if we were fine vases. *Ma foi!* we ought all to be sold as bargains, — damaged goods. I am sure we are all cracked somewhere; the fracture may be hidden, but never mind, it is there, and every woman knows just where it is, and feels it too. Marie has re-

ceived hers; she will never be sound again. It is very hard, all the same, for us older women to see young girls come into life so fresh, so fair, and so unconscious, and tap! there they are, hit right in the heart, and no one can save or prevent it. I wonder if there is a sound woman in the world!"

"I should hope not, Madame!" exclaimed Monsieur Goupilleau, involuntarily. "What an unbearable creature she would be! No." Of summer evenings, in gallery conversations, one hazards any thought. Perhaps it came from some of his early poetry. "God knows best; when he wishes to put the finishing, the perfecting touch to a woman, he simply sends her in youth some misfortune. It is his way; and I for one," shrugging his shoulders, "have nothing to criticise, seeing the results;" looking — but she was not aware of it — at the woman before him.

"The invitation comes this year like a God-send."

Apropos of the Deity, Madame drifted back to the important item in her mind. "I can see now, it is positively the best thing we can

do. To-day is Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday," she counted on her fingers. "Yes, I think we can take the Saturday boat; you know the boats leave every Saturday evening. And now," — rising, — "I must go immediately and inform Madame Joubert. To tell you the truth, my friend," — in the merest whisper, — "I do not think I could endure Madame Joubert all the summer. She is of a rigidity, — a rigidity!" raising her eyes and hands to express it. "But do not go; I shall return in a moment. I have something else to consult you about, you are so kind!"

II.

ON THE PLANTATION.

THE autumn was struggling for recognition, and was making an impression upon all but the mid-day hours. In the mornings, the air came cool and crisp, full of incentives to work. In the evenings, the soft languor and dreamy inertness of summer had been driven away by a wide-

awake activity, with good resolutions and plans of future energy to be discussed inside closed doors and windows into late hours of the night. The roses in the garden bloomed pale and listless after their exhausting summer season, shivering perfumelessly in the practical October breezes. The trees were in the full glory of their rich green foliage. The cane in the fields stood in thick, solid maturity, with long, green, pendent leaves curling over and over in bewildering luxuriance. The sunset clouds, bursting with light and color, gilded the tops of the boundary woods and illumined like a halo the familiar features of plantation life. The Mississippi River, reflecting and rivalling the sky above, rolled, an iridescent current, between its yellow mud banks cut into grotesque silhouettes by crevasses and steamboat landings as it dimpled in eddies over shallows, boiled and swirled in hollow whirlpools over depths, or rushed with inflexible, relentless rapidity, following the channel in its angular course from point to point.

The day's work had come to an end. The plantation bell rang out its dismissal and benediction. The blacksmith laid down the half-

sharpened cane-knife and began covering up the fire. From mysterious openings on all sides of the sugar-house workmen issued with tools in their hands. The stable doors were thrown open, and the hostlers, old crooked-legged negroes, hurried about with food for the mules. The cows tinkled their impatient bells outside the milking-lot, while the frantic calves bounded and bleated inside. From the two long rows of whitewashed cabins in the quarters the smoke began to rise. The drowsy young women, sitting with their babies on the cabin steps, shifted their positions, and raised their apathetic eyes from the eager faces pressing against their bosoms to the heavens above for ocular confirmation of the bell, and turned their ears toward the road from the fields. The exempt old women, the house dragons, wrinkled, withered, decrepit, deformed, with all but life used out of them, hobbled around in a fictitious bustle, picking up chips, filling buckets of water at the cistern, or stood with their hands pressed against their bent backs to send blood-curdling threats and promises after the children.

Along the smooth yellow road through the

field came the "gang," with their mules and wagons, ploughs and hoes. In advance walked the women, swaying themselves from side to side with characteristic abandon, lighting their rude pipes, hailing the truce to toil with loud volubility. Against the luminous evening sky their black profiles came out with startling distinctness, showing features just sharpening into regularity from cartilaginous formlessness, the gleam of white teeth, and the gaudy colors of the cotton kerchiefs knotted across their brows. Their bodies, as though vaguely recalling ancestral nudity amid tropical forests, seemed to defy concealment, throwing out bold curves and showing lines of savage grace through the scant folds of their loose-fitting garments. Sylvan secrets seemed still to hang around them. In their soft sad eyes, not yet cleared and brightened by sophistication, spoke the untamed desires of wild, free Nature; while fitfully in the opaque depths shone bright gleams of a struggling intelligence, pathetic appeals as from an imprisoned spirit protesting against foul Circean enchantment. The men followed, aggressively masculine, heavy-limbed, slow of movement on

their hampered, shod feet; wearing their clothes like harness; with unhandsome, chaotic faces, small eyes, and concealed natures. They watched the women with jealous interest, excluding them from their hilarity, and responding grudgingly and depreciatingly to their frank overtures. The water-carriers, half-grown boys and girls, idled at a distance, balancing their empty pails on their bare heads, — quick and light on their feet, graceful, alert, intuitive, exuberant with life and animal spirits, they were happy in the thoughtless, unconscious enjoyment of the short moment that yet separated them from their hot, dull, heavy, dangerous maturity.

The anticipations of cheer and rest, the subtile satisfaction of honestly tired bodies; the flattering commendations of their own skill from the finely cultivated stand of cane on each side of them; the past expiations of ploughing, ditching, weeding, hoeing; the freezing rains; the scorching suns; but, above all, the approach of the grinding season, the "roulaison," with its frolics, excitements, and good pay, — all tended to elate their spirits; and their voices, in joke, song, laugh, and retort, sped down the road

before them to the quarters, and evoked responsive barks and shouts from the dogs and children there.

It was the busy time of the year, and the anxious time too, — the roulaison. It was the period to which the rest of the year led up, the chronological terminus of calculation and cultivation, when the fields with their accumulated interest of labor and capital were delivered over for judgment to the sugar-house. Always dominating the place, the material importance of the sugar-house became tyrannical, oppressive, as cane-cutting approached. It reared itself — an ugly, square, red-brick structure — menacingly before the fields; it dwarfed the "big house" into insignificance, and, with its vast shed, divided by the cane-carrier, its chimneys, furnaces, boiler, bagasse-heaps, its mountainous wood-pile and barricade of new hogsheads, it shut out the view of the river from the quarters, and consigned the latter to a species of seclusion. What its verdict would be, was now the one item of interest to all, from the oldest gray-beard to the youngest thinker on "Bel Angely" plantation. What the sugar-house decided,

fixed the good or bad character of the past year, and approved or disproved the executive ability of the plantation manager. It is a close contest between man and Nature, and the always increasing science of the one is more than counterbalanced by the capricious obstinacy of the other. The old men and women, heirlooms of departed experiences, found themselves growing in importance with autumn, and their rusty memories became oracles to furnish data for prognostication. There were the "big freeze" and the "early freeze" and the "late freeze" years. There were years when the cane sprouted in the mats, when the second-year stubble could not be told from first-year, and the first-year stubble filled up like plant cane. Then there were all the years marked by a water-line of rises, overflows, and crevasses. There was one memory that contained a year in which the Mississippi froze all over, and several that perpetuated the falling of the stars; but however persistently such a recurrence was periodically suggested, Nature had been pleased to withhold a repetition. The autocratic sugar-house itself was not beyond damaging recollec-

tions: it might have been a natural product, or a season, for the number of hitches and breaks with which it managed to vary its runs, and the success with which it eluded its yearly examiners and tinkers. Then, there was the sacharometer to disparage the splendid growth of the cane, the polariscope to contradict the sacharometer, and, finally, the commission merchant to give the lie to Nature and man; with high charges and low prices to enjoin all hopes, reverse all calculations, and not only damn the past but confound the future. No roulaison ever came exactly like a preceding one, and no season ever duplicated its calamities; but never had roulaison come with such guarantee of success, to be met with so unforeseen a mishap as the illness of Monsieur Félix, — ill in bed of sciatica!

In the great ledger commenced by the first sugar-making Angely, down to day before yesterday, never had such an item been recorded. It was like the illness of a commander just before battle. And such a commander as Monsieur Félix was! — not trusting the sun to shine or the cane to grow in his absence; his ever-watchful eye and unwearied sagacity pervading

the plantation from limit to limit; so omniscient and self-reliant that if there were one place on the perverse globe that could dispense with supernal jurisdiction, one place that could be safely trusted to earthly viceregency, that place was Bel Angely plantation, Parish of St. Charles. He had had his bed pulled close to the window, and any hour of the day, from dawn to dark, his bright red face, with its fierce gray mustache, could be seen looking out, and his excited voice heard screaming, scolding, expostulating, and threatening, until even the pet chickens and ducks deserted their favorite feeding-place, and the little, crawling black children, with their skirts tied up under their arms, learned to imitate their elders, and crept nimbly under the gallery or dodged behind the out-houses to avoid him. If the door of his bedchamber were inadvertently left open but a second, little gusts of passion would escape down the hall, blasting like tiny siroccos the healthful calm and good-humor outside. Mademoiselle Aurore herself, with all her natural and cultivated conscientiousness, had to feign deafness in order to secure necessary leisure for housekeeping directions.

"*Ah, mon Dieu ! les hommes ! les hommes !*" was all she could exclaim to her own and the interrogatories of others. She knew by experience that weather contingencies and constitutional irregularities were always to be visited on the females of the house. She did not repine at things she was inured to, or rebel against a manifest design of Providence; but that wretched Gabi! The abbreviation named an important division in the cares and responsibilities of her life, — a half-Indian, half-negro waif whom she had hopefully taken in charge, a rightful heir of the combined laziness of two races, and trustee of the mischief of all.

No wonder she was nearly distracted and completely unable, as heretofore, to extract good omens from patent misfortunes. Her life had been counted by roulaisons, as some women's are by Springs, and she felt as if this one were going to put her, with the cane in the fields, between the great revolving grinders of the mill. There was always enough to be done, — enough impatience and vexation to contend with naturally. If Gabi could only have acquitted himself properly! If Félix could only

have gotten ill at some other time! If she could only be allowed to take the sciatica as a physical instead of a mental burden! She had done everything, as a sister and a Christian, to relieve the tension of affairs. She had placed herself at the disposition of every functionary on the place, — sugar-maker, cooper, engineer, blacksmith, — and was at the beck and call of every "hand" coming for food, medicine, advice, or instruction. She had entered into negotiations with every saint in the calendar amenable to representations on the subject of sugar or sciatica. Her room fairly blazed with temporary shrines, and candles which her own little personal requisitions had kept for years in a state of perpetual incandescence; by a *coup-d'état* she had transferred them all from her own account to that of the plantation and her brother. She was in constant communication with the parish priest, although he was a rough, vulgar Gascon whom she detested. In fact, she had expended vows and promises so recklessly, that were but half her prayers granted, she could look forward to none but a future of religious insolvency if not bankruptcy.

But Gabi! that was an entirely superfluous complication.

As usual she had been too zealous. To save the labor of a man, at so critical a time, and to extort tardy appreciation of her protégé, she had taken it upon herself to send him for the mail. She had often wished to send him before, his trustworthiness being a matter of dispute between her and her brother; but Félix had always peremptorily refused. He was prejudiced against Gabi, and there was no arguing away his prejudices; but his illness afforded a timely opportunity of destroying them. *Hélas!*

She stood by the door of the chamber, in which not one but a dozen sciaticas appeared to be unleashed, holding in her hands the mail-bag: not the one she had given Gabi with so many careful instructions in the gray light of the morning,— that one had been dropped and dropped in the dust and mud of the road and ditches; and finally, when Gabi had concluded to take his rest unbroken in the shade of a tree instead of in fractional naps on the mule's back, the swine had come along, and with ruthless tusks had reduced

the contents to a shapeless mass. She had extracted one crumpled, soiled, foul letter from the débris, and put it in the new, clean, alternate bag, — one letter! when at this season Félix was corresponding with every other man in New Orleans! And Gabi had made such a good first communion last spring, and never, never missed church! The mule, too, had wandered away, Saint Anthony alone knew where; Gabi was in her cabinet now, hiding from Edmond, who was searching for him with a whip. She could keep it from Félix until he got well; but then, of course, she must tell him.

When she came out of the room a half-hour later she was enveloped in a bitter condemnation of postmistresses and neglectful correspondents, and pursued by a last rush of important commissions.

"Send Edmond to me. Tell Joe to get ready to take the next boat to the city. I thought you were going to hunt up that roll of wire in the store-room. Has n't old Sîmon sent yet? Don't forget to copy Smith's estimate. Go to the sugar-house — no; I shall tell Duval myself to go to the devil with his charges. Don't

forget about the lamp-wicks and the towels for the sugar-house, and — oh, yes, tell Stasie to fetch me some ink; it is very strange that the inkstand is never filled unless I see about it myself — and Aurore!"

"Yes, Féfé."

"The key of the medicine chest!"

"*Misère! Misère!*" She held her hands to her head, trying to sort them out. She made a motion toward the sugar-house, but changed it to the direction of the store-room. She remembered the medicine-chest key, and felt for the key-basket on her arm. It was not there. She wondered where it could be, and started toward her chamber in search of it, when she caught a glimpse of Madame Lareveillère on the gallery. Then the reproach came to her that she had not yet wished her friend good-evening.

"*Bon-soir*, Eugénie."

"*Bon-soir*, Aurore."

"*Ma chère*, I feel like a pagan, leaving you so much alone; but Féfé, — you cannot imagine what he is! What makes men such devils when they are sick? If Féfé would only be sensible

and have a physician and get well; but no, he and Stasie think they can cure anything. Physician! he would as soon see a priest, and priests are his *bêtes-noires*. How can an intelligent man be so prejudiced? But it is the way he was educated; that comes of sending boys to France to be educated; that is the teaching of Messieurs Voltaire and Rousseau. Oh, I compliment them!"

Her irony was mordant. She came out of the doorway and seated herself upon the top step of the staircase that wound its way to the basement underneath. "And Gabi! ah, that is too much! Fancy, Eugénie, after all the trouble I took to explain to him this morning, he brings the mail-bag devoured by hogs, — all the letters a disgusting mass. Only one could I extricate entire for Féfé. I don't speak of your letters —"

"Oh, you know very well I never get letters from any one but Madame Joubert; always the same school news. The swine are welcome."

"I wish Féfé were so reasonable. He will be furious, both about the letters and the mule. And he will say — you know what reason he will

give for it all — religion; too much Mass. He will say he expected it before, and I shall never hear the end of it. Now, we, — because Gabi was pious, and really, Eugénie, at times in church I have watched him, he had moments of genuine fervor, — we would say that his religion was a reason why he should bring the mail well and be a good servant; but not Féfé, he is so prejudiced. It prevents everything."

Mademoiselle Aurore sighed and looked down the avenue to the river, her thoughts sadly enumerating the calculations and hopes blighted by Gabi's recalcitrance. Her thin, regular features and sallow complexion showed the exhaustive harassment of the past two days.

She and Madame Lareveillère had been to school together, were *amies de cœur* and *toute dévouées* on every class-book, from the *abécédaire* up to the "Histoire de France,"and their confidences had followed the uninterrupted growth of their hearts from dolls to sentiments. There was a period when their hearts had been as bare to each other as their faces; but that was long, long ago. Time, age, or self-consciousness had since draped and obscured them one from the

other. The abundant stream of their confessions was being reduced to a clear, cool surface-rill of generalities. One could only guess at the changes that must have taken place in the other, or try to compute them by covert observation, furtive soundings, and silent criticism. Habit now continued the links that bound them, and prolonged the intimacy inaugurated by impulse. They were together this summer after a longer period of separation than usual.

Madame sighed with Mademoiselle Aurore, but her sympathetic look was accompanied with the private reflection: "Heavens! what a difference a man makes in a woman's looks, — that is, of course, a man who is not a brother, — poor Aurore!" At school, Aurore's relations with her sex had been as close as possible; she was *la plus femme des femmes*. Now, economical Nature seemed stealthily recalling one by one charms which had proved a useless, unprofitable investment; flattening her chest, straightening her curves, prosaicising her eyes, diluting her voice; in short, despoiling the handmaiden of Saint Catherine almost beyond the recognition of her dearest friend. The little heart that once

bounded so frankly forward toward orange blossoms was being led by religion now away from mirrors, adornments, fripperies, and follies of the flesh, away from Madame Lareveillère, away from herself, down an austere path rugged with artificial vicissitudes, where a crucifix and Golgotha replaced the rose-winged visions of youth, and hope offered the extinction in place of the gratification of desire.

"Mamzelle, Monsieur Félix asks if you have forgotten the key of the medicine chest?"

"*Ah! la, la!*" The suspended avalanche of neglected commissions fell upon her.

"Mamzelle, Monsieur Félix asks —"

"I hear, Stasie, I hear."

She put her hand mechanically to her arm for the key-basket. "Ah, yes, my key-basket, — I have left it somewhere; but where can I have left it?"

"It is impossible, Mamzelle, to hear one word you are saying."

"I was only talking to myself, Stasie."

"*Plait-il?*"

"Nothing, Stasie, nothing."

She screamed this beyond doubt of misunder-

standing, and went into the hall audibly wondering as to the whereabouts of her key-basket. It was perhaps from accommodating her voice to Stasie's increasing deafness, and her patience to the increasing obstinacy of this crabbed, peevish heritage, that both had become so attenuated in Mademoiselle Aurore.

The master's house — the big house, as it was metaphorically called — stood aloof in fastidious isolation from, but in watchful proximity withal of, the money-making sugar-house and plebeian quarters. It was not, — to the people on the plantation at least, and few others ever came nearer to it than the road in front, — it was not, nor ever had been, simply a massive brick cottage, with tall round pillars, a tiled basement, a pointed, projecting roof, and deep, shady galleries. It was not this nor any other technically defined edifice, any more than the altar is a carpenter's contrivance to believers, or Louis XIV. was a man of small stature to his courtiers. It was never intended to be an ordinary, common dwelling-place for ordinary, common people, and time had respected the original purpose.

Changes had come into the world, and even crept into the parish of St. Charles; but a rigid quarantine had kept all but the inevitable revolutions of Nature and reform from the house and its inmates, and had preserved in unbroken transmission the atmosphere and spirit of an age which supplied adventurous noblemen with principalities in a new world, and equipped them with a princely largesse of power from an old one. As far as bricks and mortar and hand-sawed cypress boards and hand-made nails could do it, they expressed here caste, wealth, power, pride, government, religion. Whatever the record of other similar houses may be, this one had maintained its responsibilities and sustained its traditions with a spirit that Versailles might not have blushed to own and imitate. The garden, with its carefully planned star and crescent shaped beds, had paths which a century ago connected them into a milky way of loveliness and sweetness, — encouraging and inspiring walks for lovers; but now a riotous growth of roses had tangled them into such a wilderness that the original gardener would have needed divine guidance through

his own work, and lovers — had there been any now — would have been restricted to the broad avenue leading from house to river without deviations or obscurities for either feet or hearts. It was hedged all around with wild orange, except in front, where the river was allowed a glance at the gallery. What once had been a grateful shade had increased to a damp gloom. The magnolias and oaks had so abused their privilege of growing, that they leaned their branches against the very roof itself, and veiled with their moss the little Gothic windows and the observatory into complete inutility, frightening away even the vivacious tendencies of October from the front of the somnolent, superannuated homestead. Here it was always seventeenth century and retrospection and regrets; but on the other side of the house, where the trees had been cut and the sun shone, the breeze was welcome to frolic and sing; there it was always nineteenth century with the latest change of date, for there were Monsieur Félix's bedchamber and office.

There was a beautiful vista through the orange-trees to the river, and there were ever-

varying heights of rose and gold and lilac overhead, — a mocking-bird sang in the shadows of the neglected garden. Eugénie Lareveillère, balancing herself backward and forward in the rocking-chair by the rosetted tip of her slipper, saw nothing, heard nothing but herself. Her muslin dress rose and fell light as the clouds above her; she held her chin in her hand and pursued the thoughts interrupted by Aurore, — thoughts which, since Monsieur Félix's illness, had been allowed to gain more and more complete possession of her, until it seemed that all Nature had become a cheval-glass to reflect her; and not to reflect merely the dainty piquante outward figure with vexing reminders of the mutations of time and the mutability of woman, but her *intérieur* also, — the disordered interior of one of the undecided sex in the throes of a decision. It is true she had come to the country for reflection, but she had managed to elude it successfully until within the last two days. In a week she would return to the city, — if the summer could only have been prolonged indefinitely! The old *allée* at the school came entrancingly before her, where she and Aurore —

the pretty, poor little blonde and the pretty, rich little brunette — used to promenade arm in arm in the twilight, interchanging the deep mysteries and experiences of their sixteen-year-old hearts. The confidences ceased as soon as there was really something to confide. Madame longed for just one such twilight moment; but the only *allée* was the broad one to the river, and — they were not sixteen, and Aurore could think of nothing but her religion, Gabi, and sugar-making.

"If I only had a friend, an adviser; ah! a woman ought never to be without one, — two in fact."

The evening was getting cool; she tied her handkerchief around her throat, and moved her chair closer to the wall.

"If it were only a question of duty; There was nothing a woman could not do for duty, or religion; that made marriage so much more reasonable, so much less ridiculous, *enfin;* but love!" A rosy reflection from the clouds fell all over her face, and she undid the handkerchief.

She could see her friends smile delicately,

and raise their shoulders ever so slightiy, and hear the "ho! ho! ho!" of some irrepressible *commère.*

"Love! what! she believes in it still? *Elle en veut, encore!* what innocence, *hein?*"

"But is a woman's heart a thermometer to be regulated according to outside appearances?" she asked herself, indignantly. "Ah! if *pauvre maman* were here!"

The tears came in her eyes, as they always did at the remembrance of the pale, abraded face and shrinking, poor, genteel figure of her mother. Many an "All Saints" had passed since she had placed her first chrysanthemum bouquet and black bead souvenir before poor maman's tomb in the old St. Louis Cemetery.

"If she were here, she would decide for me!"

Eugénie had not been required to say even a word to her *fiancé* Lareveillère. He had seen her at the exhibition of her school. She played the harp and wore sleeves to fall back off her arms, and her golden curls were all that hid her neck. She had the dress still; poor

maman made it, and trimmed it with the lace from her own wedding dress. Poor maman was only afraid that the fiancé might change his mind; *pas de chance!*

And he whose companionship had been so thorough an education in men and matrimony, — he had his bouquet and souvenir also on "All Saints," and a Mass besides, just the same as if —

"Whatever marriage is, it is least of all what a school-girl thinks."

There was something else buried in the same tomb, too, — seventeen years old, fresh and innocent, shrouded in a bridal veil. "Ah! if the young only knew more, or the old less." These thoughts always came to her with such peculiar emphasis that the tears which usually rose over "poor maman" fell over herself.

"The first time you go into it blind; the second, ha! with microscopes over the eyes!"

The old deaf Stasie came from under the gallery and walked out in front with her conch shell to blow the summons to supper. She was stiff with rheumatism, and the wavering melancholy notes fell on the air like a *Memento mori.*

With characteristic obstinacy she held to the office intrusted to her when she was elastic and graceful; when her wrinkled skin was bright smooth gold; when her lips were full and red, and her teeth white and firm as the shell they clasped. That was before the trees were allowed to overshadow the garden, and the moss to hang in such mournful folds; when the roses were kept in subjection; when the occupants of the tombs under the clump of cypresses out there, her masters and mistresses, hurried in from fields, levee, and garden at her clear resonant calls, — calls which easily vaulted the broad stream and fell in musical cadence on the opposite bank.

Marie Modeste caught the sound on the levee, and started as if she were still at school and still punishable.

"*Aïe*, Marcélite! the horn! I shall be late again for supper."

Oh la nature! la belle nature! Marie had written compositions on it, and learned poetry about it; but that was before she and Racine and Corneille had seen it. This was all different, — these sunsets and moon-risings, these

clouds and stars and fields, the river, the trees, the flowers, the animals, the poultry, the men and women in the quarters, with their primeval domesticity, the slow movements, the sudden developments, the mysteries, the revelations, the veils withdrawn, one after another, like the mists from the river, until the great stream of life lay bare before her awed gaze. How much of the world lay outside the walls of St. Denis, unmentioned in geography or history! How much of God outside the Catechism! What was a school life of fourteen years in comparison with a plantation life of three months! Her imagination had not prepared her for it; there was no end to thinking about it ; every moment a new thought shone out in a blank space like the stars in the sky, and still her mind was not full.

She hurried through the quarters, nodding to the women, speaking to the children, looking for glimpses of the procession from the fields, pursued by the persistent, vivid, recurring feeling of having been there and done it all before, — the feeling which had thrilled her again and again on the plantation, but never at school.

From the first day it had been natural for her to talk to the negroes, go into their little cabins, seek and respond to their confidences. They accepted her too, spontaneously, as if she had been their own Mamzelle by fact and title.

Not so with Marcélite. Between her and her people there was no good feeling; instead, the distrust of a class toward a superior member of it, and the disdain of an ascending member toward an inferior class. The men ignored her; the women followed her with resentful eyes, and whetted their tongues when she passed, taking good care that their remarks should fall short of retort, but not of hearing.

The brick-dust on the bare floor crackled under Marie's feet as she hastily entered the dining-room in the basement, almost expecting to hear the customary, "Twenty-five lines by heart, Mademoiselle."

Madame and Mademoiselle Aurore were at the table; Stasie was bringing in the large glasses of cold boiled milk, with the heavy cream wrinkling on top. A candelabra of two candles illuminated the table, while its fellow

dispelled the gloom of the tall mantel-piece, and enabled Mademoiselle Aurore's guests and the portrait of her father to see each other dimly. There were very few living operations in the old house that did not go on in the presence of some pictured Angely. They hung in every room against the pale-green walls variegated by damp and mould, — a diminishing line, nourished by constant intermarriage, until Mademoiselle Aurore and Monsieur Félix looked like their first Louisiana progenitors seen through the small end of an opera-glass. Mademoiselle Aurore was talking excitedly. "*Ma chère!* you will scarcely believe it; I can hardly recover from the surprise myself. Talk of changes; that's a change. Fefé will actually have to send to the city this roulaison for Italians, Italians!" —she pronounced the name with every facial expression of disgust, — "Italians to take off the crops; if poor papa could see that!" She looked with filial reverence at the beardless youth in the gilt frame. Her papa had been painted when at school in France, and died too soon to leave a more parental representation of himself. "But, Stasie, give Mademoiselle

Marie some *fricassée, fricassée! fricassée!* That is what competition does, — negroes running from place to place to get five cents more pay; and it all comes from that old Sîmon and Mr. Smith. What more can you expect? They do not care; they have no sentiment. A plantation is a sugar factory to them, that is all. The idea that such *canaille* should be allowed to profit by the ruin of our old families, and buy up the finest places in Louisiana! Oh, they can afford to offer more to negroes than others, and force us to hire Italians! Old Sîmon: Stasie can tell you who old Sîmon is; you ought to hear Stasie talk about him. She remembers the day well when he used to go up and down the coast with a pack on his back, crying *Rabais*, and selling things to the negroes; it is only right that he should pay them well now, — he made them pay enough, *vas!* and now he owns *La Trinité*. And Mr. Smith, *tiens!* Eugénie, you remember Nathalie Cortez at school; you know when she graduated! Well, her daughter has just been married to this Mr. Smith. Don't repeat it as coming from me, you know, but," she lowered her voice,

"his father was a negro trader, — a negro trader, my dear! absolutely a man Nathalie would not have permitted to sit at the table with her. Stasie knows; you ask Stasie. That's what poverty does." Her face was red and her eyes gleamed with excitement.

"I cannot hear a word you say, Mamzelle," said Stasie, in despair. "If you would only speak a little more distinctly, instead of getting excited."

"The *pain-perdu! pain-perdu!*" screamed Mademoiselle Aurore, eagerly profiting by the opportunity. "And Féfé, he exasperates me so! Whatever old Sîmon or Mr. Smith gets, Féfé thinks he must buy too, — vacuum-pans, condensers, steam-trains, bagasse-burners, a perfect 'galimatias' of machinery. As if gentlemen needed all that; and as if they had not been making sugar long enough in Louisiana without it! For my part, I like the old open kettles, and I prefer the sugar, too, though it was not so white, — and Stasie, she prefers it too. In poor papa's time it was all so different; but Félix has his own ideas. He loves everything modern and new; he is all for the practical. The house

and garden might just as well be in Texas, for all he cares about them; and then, after all, if old Sîmon or Mr. Smith makes sugar a little whiter than ours, or sells it a little bit higher, oh, then it is Good Friday the rest of the winter! But, '*Mon cher*,' I tell him, 'think who they are.'"

"Monsieur Félix asks Mamzelle to come there just one moment," said Edmond, Stasie's brother, putting his head inside the door.

"Oh, I know what it is, — it is that estimate I forgot to copy. *Sans excuses, chérie;* you see how it is."

Before Monsieur Félix's illness it was very gay after supper, sitting on the gallery watching the shooting-stars above the river, talking about old times *avant la guerre*, or playing dominos in the hall for bon-bons; but now it was sadness itself. Madame and Marie went up the winding steps to the gallery to await Mademoiselle Aurore and her never-ceasing theme of plantation crises. The moon had risen, and changed the landscape from the showy splendor of sunset to a weird etherealization. The rose-vines, which had crept over from the garden to garland and wreathe the brick pillars,

threw fantastic, flitting shadows on the gallery floor, and checkered their faces. The broad path to the river was silver, the tall gate-posts were whitened into marble monuments, the river was a boundless sea of golden ripples. The faint sounds of animated life in the quarters made the loneliness and silence inside the wild-orange hedge more intense. Madame sank in her rocking-chair for another *séance* with herself: —

" Marie was young, Marie could have ideals, Marie could yet dream in the moonlight, unchidden by life and experience."

She looked at the slight, childish figure, seated on the balustrade, leaning her head far back in her arms, looking up, beyond the moss, the trees, and the clouds, to follow the moon making and unmaking phantasmagorial cities, lakes, and mountains in the world above her, — lost in an ecstasy of self-forgetfulness, drifting away from earth and mortality, soaring higher and higher on the wings of a pure, fresh imagination, until the glorious orb itself is reached, and the silver rays make her one of themselves.

She envied morbidly the pure spirituality

which yet enveloped the young girl, her unspotted cleanliness of simplicity, her virgin ignorance of the quantities in the problem of life, her incapacity for calculation. There were surprises yet in store for her, there was still an unknown before her. Whatever misfortune had done to her, could do to her, her seventeen years had been protected and were flawless in their innocence.

"I was once like Marie, and she will one day be like me. Why must women be always looking for the unattainable, — why cannot we be contented? *Enfin*, — one cannot always be seventeen and wear white dresses; but if it is the will of God, why must we have these feelings, these moments, for example? She will know it all, she will crave to know it, and then, like me, she will crave acquittance of the knowledge and the refreshment of ignorance again. It is always with us women the fight between the heart and the soul. The happy ones are born without the one or the other."

As through the intervening shadows of the trees she could see the dazzling river, so beyond her present doubts and hesitations a transcendental prospect offered itself; but sarcastic

society and frigid friends came between to be propitiated by sophistical reasonings and prosaic excuses. Aurore particularly, — if Aurore were only sympathetic as she used to be! But to a woman who scorned one honeymoon, what reasons would justify two?

"I shall not tell her, — that I am determined; she shall not find it out, until — I would rather confide in Marcélite."

The hairdresser, in her silk apron and white kerchief, passed on tiptoe, not to disturb her, holding her stiff calico dress to keep it from rattling; she went to Marie.

"*Bébé!*" she whispered.

The girl took no notice of her.

"*Bébé!*"

"*Paix, Marcélite, paix.*" She barely moved her lips; it was so delicate, so exquisite, a breath would destroy it, — her moon-dream.

"You will catch cold."

"Ah, Marcélite!" she said entreatingly, "why could you not have left me one moment more? Now —" She sighed, and turned her eyes upward once again.

Marcélite advanced to the edge of the balus-

trade and looked up too, to see what attraction the commonplace moon was offering. She knew that when the moon was on the increase it was a good time to cut the ends of the hair, and some persons could read the *bon aventure* in the moonlight, and the Voudous — she made the sign of the cross whenever she thought of them, although her experience had proved it a very insufficient protection against their charms. She asked herself, eying Marie from under her heavy lids, why her *bébé* looked so thin and pale. She was smaller and lighter even than when at school; after three months in the country, too! and her eyes with the same hollow black shadows, — why did not those shadows go, now that studying was all done and life was so pleasant? A fierce impatience and rebellion surged in her as usual when confronted by what she could not understand or prevent. Other girls were women in appearance at Marie's age; why did she not shed her childhood also? Why did not her arms round and her shoulders soften? Why could not some of her own exuberant flesh and blood be given to her *bébé?* She did not want it; she would like to tear it off and fling it away,

if her *bébé* were to be always so *chétive*, so *triste*. One sickness —

"*Bébé*," she whispered, her voice trembling at the thought; "you will catch cold, or fever, the air is so bad at this season."

"There, I hope you are satisfied now!" Marie said irritably, jumping down, and grumbling to herself, "If Marcélite would only let her alone! The moonlight was so beautiful, and at school they never enjoyed the moonlight except in contraband. In a week she would be back at school. Why could not Marcélite let her forget that; it was so seldom she could forget it! Marcélite never thought about it, nor Madame either, but she —" she had rehearsed it so often, the whole scene came before her in a flash.

"*Tiens, voilà Marie Modeste*, back again at school! *mais, chère*, is *le vieux* going to make you stay another year? *Quelle injustice!*" She would shrug her shoulders, and say in an indifferent way, just as if it were a matter of course, "Ah! you know, it is a romance, — all a romance of Marcélite's. My papa, he was killed during the war, my mamma, she died when I was a baby, and Marcélite — just fancy,

chère, that good Marcélite — worked for me night and day, to send me to school; she it was who gave me everything."

She shrugged her shoulders, straightened her head, and her lips moved rapidly, just as if she were at school, only the tightness came right across her chest, always just at this point, and she had to swallow very rapidly to keep the tears from coming to her eyes; for the important thing was not to cry, not to let them suspect. Oh, she had learned at school not to cry; even Madame Joubert, when she used to stand her in the corner with the foolscap on, for making faults in her dictation, could not make her cry when she was a little girl, — and she was a woman now. Did Marcélite think she was afraid of the fever? If it would only come and kill her before next week, it would be better, far better. What had she to — "

"I shall go to bed; come, Marcélite." It was better, anyway, to be in the bed, in the dark, all by herself. She stopped to kiss Madame good-night, — Madame in her pretty *toilette*, with her rings and laces and ribbons. Ah! God was good to Madame; she did not have such things

to think about. "Why, after all, did He select precisely her to orphan, and make her credulous simply to be deceived? Who was to be furthered or bettered by the experiment upon her? Could the same Providence create a Marie Modeste and a Madame Lareveillère?"

"*Bonne-nuit, ma mignonne;* going to Mass again to-morrow morning?"

For Mademoiselle Aurore had drawn Marie into the active routine of her religious exercises. Masses, confessions, communions, retreats, penances, novenas, fastings; they had discouraged the kindly efforts of Nature in behalf of her physical improvement, but her mind reflected the benefit of the discipline by a satisfactory state of quiescence. There were moments of transcendental serenity accorded to her when suffering appeared the only proper joy, and martyrdom the only proper vocation of women; but after a long walk, or a visit to the quarters, and talking to the women there, or the moonlight, as at present, they vanished, — these moments; and the lives of the saints she yearned to imitate, — her heart rejected them; and their being exposed to the jeering multitude, or

thrown to beasts, — what was that to going back to St. Denis? She was at the pitiable age when sensitiveness is a disease, before moral courage has had time to develop. "*You* are happy, *ma fille?*" Madame drew the face again to her lips; she loved to hear it confirmed.

"I, Madame? happy!"

"But, of course, Marie is going to Mass with me to-morrow."

Mademoiselle Aurore answered the question she had heard in the hall. The moon poured its effulgence on her pious, enthusiastic face as, an hour afterward, from her seat on the staircase, she was still eloquently extolling to her friend the celestial peace vouchsafed to those women and only to those women, who, renouncing with fortitude the pleasures of sex and youth, forsake the world and consecrate themselves to the perfect vocation of perpetual virginity and prayer, thus preparing their souls for those beatitudes in a future life reserved solely for the pure and undefiled.

"Madame is as bad as Marcélite," thought Marie in her chamber; "but what can they suppose I am thinking of all the time?" She had

only monosyllables for the kindly services and inquiries of the nurse.

"Is anything the matter with you, *bébé?*"

"Nothing, Marcélite."

"You are sure you feel well?"

"Oh yes, I feel well."

"Let me get you a glass of sirup and water."

"No, thank you, Marcélite."

"Did you hear about that little rascal Gabi?"

"Yes."

"Edmond should give him a good whipping; the idea of Mademoiselle Aurore hiding him in her room! She spoils him until he is perfectly good for nothing." But, as usual, it seemed impossible to awake an interest in Marie.

Was it to be always that way? Would she never open her heart to Marcélite? What could she be thinking of all the time, — was it hatred and contempt of her nurse? Then let her say it. Better the loud-mouthed fury and passion of her own people down there in the quarters, than this apathetic *white* silence. Oh for one moment of equality and confidence!

"You like it here on the plantation, *bébé?*"

"You think perhaps I prefer boarding-school?"

"Ah, but wait till you see the grinding! That is the grand time of the year on a plantation! Some night, soon, a frost will come; in the gray daylight it will look like flour sprinkled all over the cane; then, when it gets lighter, it looks like silver; when the sun gets on it, it is diamonds, diamonds scattered everywhere. Then you hear the cane-knives, *cling! clang! cling! clang!* and the cane falling, *fron! fron! fron! fron!* One cut at the top, one cut at the roots, over it goes! Each hand takes a row; I tell you the women are not behind the men then! I have seen them keep up, step by step, twenty rows at a time! A field soon gets flat and bare at that rate; then the carts coming and going, dumping their loads in the shed, the sugar-mill with all steam up; and the cane-carrier, — you will hear them sing at the cane-carrier! You never heard singing like that, all day, all night."

Did Marie hear or not?

"That will be fine, eh, *bébé?*"

She only shook her head.

"The river ran in front of the old plantation, just as it does here," Marcélite continued coura-

geously. "And the orange-trees went in long rows to the levee. The flower-garden was here, the fields over there, and the quarters on this side," indicating the localities by gesture. "But it was finer, grander. Ah, the Motte plantation was celebrated, I tell you, all up and down the coast. The quarters were like a street in the city, the sugar-house looked as big as the custom-house. The largest boats on the river would stop at our levee for the sugar and molasses. The dwelling-house was twice the size of this, and the furniture, four, five, ten times handsomer. The *armoires* were filled with laces and silks and feathers left by the mamans, grand-mamans, the aunts and cousins who were dead and gone. There were pictures all over the walls, like here, only Mottes and Viels; and this," pointing to a framed escutcheon, "was on everything, — silver, china, glass —" A thousand daily contacts had revivified what had sunk into indistinctness in her memory. She could have talked all night and not have exhausted her enumeration. "And the books! *tiens!* There was one book I will never forget; it was full of pictures about —"

"Good-night, *ma bonne;* I am afraid Madame may need you."

"*Bébé*, it was your home! Why don't you listen? Why don't you believe me? Do you think I would lie to you about *that?*" She had not the courage to say the words, though they sprang not only to her mouth but to her eyes; her very hands tried to gesticulate the appeal. No! As if she were a dog, or a lying negro caught stealing, she crept away.

Why should it be different with Madame? She had only been her paid servant, yet she was not ashamed before her, she could talk to her. And why should Madame believe her unquestioningly; yes, and give her confidences too?

"Madame, she will die! It will kill her! I knew it! I knew it that night! It will choke her heart to death. Ah, the Mottes are proud! You never saw people like them! She loves me no more! I see that, — she hates me! She believes not a word I say! My God! My God!"

Never a word of her sacrifices, her generosities, only the remorse of an impotent servant over disgrace and failure in a committed trust.

"She does not eat, she does not sleep, she lies there at night, thinking, thinking, thinking. I know; I sit outside her door and listen to her. She sighs and sometimes she cries; she calls on the Virgin. The Virgin!" with sudden jealousy. "As if the Virgin would do more for her than I! As if the Virgin could love her more, — as if God could love her more than I! She never calls for Marcélite, not once! Not once! It is better for me to kill myself, to throw myself in the river! Going to Mass! going to confession! going to communion! Mademoiselle Aurore will persuade her into a convent, will make a nun of her, — a nun!" her strong physical nature shuddering at the thought of asceticism. "There is to be, then, no future, no home, no husband, no children for her, — no pleasure?"

And so it was Marie Modeste, not Eugénie Lareveillère, who occupied Madame's mind the rest of the night.

"And I promised to be a mother to her!" She would not have been a woman if self-accusation had not come to salt the wounds caused by the sufferings of others.

The slight excitement of breakfast had worn

away, the next day, which so far was bringing forth ameliorating modifications of the conditions of its predecessor. Monsieur Félix's sciatica was on the wane,—both his confidence in himself and Mademoiselle Aurore's trust in the saints being justified. A slight frost in the morning, the first of the season, encouraged her and cheered her brother; it sweetened the cane and acknowledged her prayers. Slight frosts now on the magnificent stand in the field, and Bel Angely would surpass any former record. The normal, monotonous uniformity was settling over the house, hiding the traces of the late disruption of its harmony. There was still the sound of footfalls passing up and down the back steps to and from Monsieur Félix's room; but if the door chanced to be left open now, only the calmest voice in the most business-like tones could be distinguished, giving needful commands and directions. Mademoiselle Aurore's time was no longer fractured by importunate calls.

The friends sat in their rocking-chairs in the broad hall, dimmed to a comfortable compromise between the contesting claims of their eyes and complexions. A round mosaic table, with

brass claw feet, held their work-baskets. Mademoiselle Aurore was adding highly ornamental golden leaves to red paper roses, to be twisted, according to ecclesiastical convention, into flat pyramidal displays for the parish church, — a commencement in the liquidation of her indebtedness. Notwithstanding her confidence in her own rectitude of purpose, and her intimate negotiations with the Church, she would have felt more serenity this morning had she not sent Gabi for the mail yesterday, or had she frankly told Monsieur Félix all about it. He was improving so fast, she would have to tell him to-day; by to-morrow he would find it all out by himself. Thank Heaven! the mule at least had come home during the night.

"Oh, *chère amie!*" she was saying, "I get very much discouraged with life, I assure you; it takes a great deal of religion to enable us women to support it. It is so full of contradictions, — useless contradictions. I sometimes wish that there were no more hopes given us. They are no better than toy balloons; they dance before us very beautifully for a time, then *crac!* they burst, and we are left *plantées* there until

we get another one. I do not complain, it is against my religion; but if you knew how many hopes I have seen go to pieces that way! *Mon Dieu!* I am tired of getting new ones. Ah, you are fortunate, your life is so simple, so clear, so smooth. Now, there's Gabi, I should not have sent him; ah! I see that clearly this morning. But I have raised that child ever since he was a baby. He was picked up in the sugar-house and brought to me. I have no idea even who his mother is. Well, I thought I would take him and make a reasonable human being of him. Féfé and Stasie were against it, of course; they have never liked him. I wanted to push him; I thought I would give him the opportunity. Well, perhaps Féfé is right, after all. And he learned his Catechism so well, and made such a good first communion! Last spring, you know what I did? I got all the children of the proper age in the quarters, I taught them the Catechism myself, and I made them all make their first communion; there was a cane-cart full. Féfé and Stasie were against that too, but I was firm. Ah, it is so elevating to work like that! Féfé, he said they were rascals already,

and that I would only make hypocrites of them. Hypocrites! I ask you, Eugénie, if religion makes hypocrites? But that is Monsieur Voltaire again. I will never hear the last of this from Stasie, and next spring Féfé will only be more determined; I know Féfé."

Madame shook her head responsively. Marie's surprised, pained interrogation, Mademoiselle Aurore's discourse, Marcélite's voluble despair, had procured for her a sleepless, penitential night. She was disposed this morning for any pessimistic generalities on women, but answered not so much Mademoiselle Aurore as her own self: —

"Yes, our lives are surprise-boxes to us women; we never know what is going to come out of them: our own plans, our own ideas count for nothing. Look at our schoolmates: not one turned out as she expected. Those who had a vocation to religious lives, who would be nothing but nuns, they were the first ones married and having children christened. Those who were ready to fall in love with every new tenor at the opera, they became *dévotes*. Those who cared only for money fell in love with poor men; and those who made their lives a poem, with love

for the hero, they, — they married for money. When we are old and *passées*, we get what would have made our youth divine. Men are the serious occupation, women are the playthings, of fate."

"Ah, yes, men are more fortunate." Mademoiselle Aurore eagerly availed herself of the fissure in which to insert her peculiar complaint. "There is something sure, something stable in a man's life. Look at Féfé. I do not say he has not had griefs, disappointments, misfortunes even, in his life, but they did not change it, only interrupted it a minute; with me, those things take away my life itself." Her voice quivered, and the emotion in her face made her look something as she did at sixteen. She took a long breath and resumed: "It is like this: either Féfé would not have sent Gabi for the mail, or Gabi would have brought it properly, or he would have informed the whole world about it, me first of all, *coûte que coûte*. He would not have managed the truth on account of my prejudices, he would have had no hopes attached to it; now with me — " She was going to open her heart a little lower down to Madame, and reveal those hopes so paltry as to be involved in Gabi's good

conduct, so grand as to influence a terrestrial and celestial future. *Mondaine* as, to her disappointment, she had found Eugénie to be, she could well remember the angelic devotion of the little wife to that old *roué* Lareveillère. How patiently she had labored with him after the stroke of paralysis confined him night and day to his house; teaching him the graces of repentance, leading him to the altar he had deserted, persuading him to the sacraments he had mocked, forcing him — actually forcing him — to give to charity a goodly portion of that inheritance she had so hardly earned. Whatever small prospect of heaven the old French merchant now enjoyed, he owed it to Eugénie, and no one else. Aurore was determined to drive Messieurs Voltaire and Rousseau from the heart of Monsieur Félix. Eugénie could not but sympathize and encourage her.

And Madame, — at the quiver of her friend's voice, the softening of her face, the old *allée* and the twilight came before her, and she felt that she might perhaps venture —

"Ta-ta-ta-ta-ta-ta-ta!" A tiny staccato rap, light as the pecking of a bird. The ladies raised

their heads simultaneously with a nervous start. It had a preternatural sound, so sudden, just at that moment. There it was again!

"But, Eugénie, what can that be?" Aurore looked accusingly at the row of kinsmen and kinswomen gleaming on the wall in their heavy gilt frames.

Eugénie held her hand against her heart. "How it frightened me! It must be some one knocking."

"Some one knocking at the front door? Impossible!"

"Some one, perhaps, to see Monsieur Félix."

"Félix? But his visitors all know they have to go around to the other gallery. There it is again!"

"Maybe it is some one who does not know."

"I will call Stasie."

"But let us see who it is."

"Not for the world! It might be something horrible out there."

She dropped her flowers and commenced a shrill, "Stasie! Stasie!" from the very table, continuing it to the back gallery and out into the yard to some inaudible distance. Madame had disappeared when they returned together.

"Go, *ma bonne* Stasie. It must be some one to see Monsieur Félix; conduct him around to the other side of the house."

The door was carefully unbolted, and Stasie, with all imaginable precautions against sudden assault, put her head out.

"But what are you doing, Stasie?" screamed Mademoiselle Aurore, as she saw the door steadily open. She had not time for the accustomed iteration, but was forced to escape unceremoniously into Madame Lareveillère's room to escape the view of the intruder. Madame was unbuttoning her *peignoir*.

"What do you think?" Aurore was excited, or she would not have been guilty of the filial impiety. "That *sotte* Stasie has actually opened the front door, and there is a stranger, at this moment, in the hall. But no; impossible!"—as she heard a stiff door being pushed open—"in the parlor! She has invited him into the parlor!"

"Mamzelle," said Stasie, coming into the room.

"Well, Stasie, I compliment you! Letting a stranger into the house this way!" Mademoiselle Aurore's voice was strident; the tone

rather than the words penetrated to the ears so tightly bandaged by the faded bandanna.

"What do you mean by opening the house this way? Are you crazy?"

"He is a gentleman — a visitor." Then, as the full meaning of Mademoiselle Aurore's attack came to her, she raised her voice, querulously: "*Comment donc?* Would you have me shut the door in his face? Would you have me drive him away — a gentleman — when he comes on a visit?"

"What nonsense! A visitor!" She turned to her friend for a dispassionate opinion.

"What! You are undressing, Eugénie?"

"Only changing my *peignoir*, Aurore. The air seems a little cool to me."

"You must understand, Stasie, there is some mistake. If he does not come to see Monsieur Félix on business, he must be going to old Sîmon's or Mr. Smith's. Go and explain to him — although you should have told him on the gallery, not brought him into the house." She uttered the words emphatically, close to Stasie's ear, and pushed her gently out of the door. "If Stasie would only allow me to get

a younger servant!" she exclaimed, when the door closed.

"There, Mamzelle, there; see for yourself!" the old woman returned, thrusting a visiting-card before her mistress's eyes as if she were as blind as she, Stasie, was deaf. "Ah, I told you so! Shut the door in his face! Put him out by the shoulders! Ah, that was not the etiquette of your grandmother, *par exemple!*"

Marcélite had come in by another door. She slipped behind Madame and whispered something in her ear.

"*Mais qu'est-ce que c'est que ça?*" Mademoiselle Aurore looked perfectly nonplussed. "I cannot understand it. Monsieur —"

"My *négligé* from Paris," whispered Madame to Marcélite, so that Mademoiselle Aurore could not notice it.

"Monsieur Armand Goupilleau. Goupilleau? Goupilleau? But I never heard of a Goupilleau. And you, Eugénie?"

"Monsieur Armand Goupilleau? Surely I know Monsieur Armand Goupilleau. He is a notary public in New Orleans — oh, but one of the most celebrated notaries there! He is

a good, good friend of mine, an old friend. He advises me about all my affairs; and an institute like the St. Denis requires a great deal of advice, I can tell you. Do I know him? I should think so. He is like a father to me, in fact."

Marcélite dropped the *négligé* over her head. "Just tie this ribbon for me, *ma bonne*." Her thin, white fingers, with the long, pointed nails, could only wander aimlessly amid the bows and laces. But the hairdresser needed neither directions nor explanations. Her dark face glowed with intelligence; she seemed transformed by a sudden illumination; her deft, light fingers never worked so felicitously, pulling out lace, tying ribbon, putting in ear-rings, lifting up a puff here and pinning a curl there until the whole expression of the *coiffure* was reanimated, passing a powder-puff over the pale face, brushing out the eyebrows, rummaging through a *sachet* for the appropriate handkerchief.

"Is he married, Eugénie?"

"But no, Aurore. — What brutality!" she thought.

"Ah!" Aurore opened the door for them to go out.

"One moment, Madame," whispered Marcélite. She was kneeling on the floor with a pair of high-heeled bronze slippers in her hand.

"Ah, I knew it! Marcélite is more of a woman than Aurore."

The *négligé* hung in long, beautiful, diaphanous folds, and exhaled a delicate fragrance of *vétyver*, as Marcélite shut the door on both ladies.

Madame took the initiative, with effusion.

"*Ah, mon ami!* what a delightful surprise! Never could you come at a better time." She held both hands to him. "Let me present you to my friend, my best friend, my old schoolmate, my sister in fact, Mademoiselle Angely. *Chère* Aurore, this is my good friend Monsieur Goupilleau, of whom you have heard me speak so often. Now you will tell us what good fairy sent you to the parish of St. Charles."

"As I said in the note which yesterday Monsieur your brother received — " began the notary in courteous explanation.

"Ah, *mon Dieu!* That is the beginning — " exclaimed Mademoiselle Aurore. "Gabi! I

must tell Félix immediately." She abruptly left the room, Monsieur Goupilleau bowing before her. Madame's vivacity fled with her; the social graces, which hung like a silken domino around her, seemed to vanish, leaving her as undisguised and embarrassed in her natural emotion as a peasant before the questioning, expectant eyes of the notary.

"And you also did not receive my letter yesterday?"

"No; as you hear, an accident—"

He took her indiscreet hand and guided her through the twilight of the large parlors to a sofa. It was a letter that had cost him an effort to write,—the wording of inexhaustible sentiment. He could never speak what he had transcribed alone in his quiet office, her image before him, musty official records around him, and a companionless life behind him. His heart, his eager, long-suppressed heart, drove the clean, sharp, steel notarial pen, and what had it not said? So, it was all lost by an accident! but it had contained one affair of business.

"Madame Joubert has made a proposition to purchase your interest in the St. Denis."

"Madame Joubert!" Madame Lareveillère repeated in supreme astonishment. Madame Joubert at the head of her brilliant aristocratic *pension!* Why, she had not a single qualification, nothing, except an education. The item of business brought reprieve, but also disappointment. Had she, then, been wrong in her intuitions, premature in her expectations?

"And Mademoiselle Motte?"

"Ah, Marie Modeste!" The sweet, novel, motherly look came into her eyes, — the one beautiful expression of which life had hitherto deprived them.

"*Mon ami*, how can I tell you! When I think of Marcélite I am ashamed of myself,— I who am white and have an education. Ah, I detest myself; but you see I was thinking so much of my own affairs."

A blush that must have been caused by her thoughts sprang from her heart and spread up to her face, and warmed even the tips of her chilled fingers.

"Aurore knew it, Aurore felt it to be a truth. And I promised to be a mother to her — "

"And I," said the notary. "a father."

"Would a mother forget her child, a young girl, for her own affairs?" It was a chaplet of self-reproach, the penitential accumulation of a wakeful, feverish night, exaggerated, incoherent. "But I thought she was happy; she is so young, you know."

She raised her eyes to his. The swine, not she, had received his letter, but his eyes contained it all, and were repeating it over and over again to the hair, the head, the face, the figure beside him, — those wonderful, eloquent eyes of a recluse poet; and she read it all, and could not feign misunderstanding. His timid, hesitating words were entirely superfluous so long as she looked at him; but her own eyes — it was safer to turn them on the piano. The diamonds gleamed on her excited fingers. Last night, when she could not sleep, she had composed it all — she always prepared her pretty speeches and notes beforehand for possible emergencies. It was to be a consent, — oh, yes, there had never been any doubt about that, — but a consent based on the exalted motives of duty and self-sacrifice, and a common obligation toward Marie Modeste; a consent expressive of all that she did

not feel; one worthy of Mademoiselle Aurore, and unobjectionable to the most fastidious wit of a sarcastic society. Her fluent tongue recited the *chef-d'œuvre* as if her friends had all been there to listen, were stationed behind the heavy curtains to hear. Only the notary himself had been forgotten; he alone should not have been present. The light died away from his face, and a grave misapprehension clouded his eyes.

"I shall go now and announce it to Aurore myself, and Monsieur Félix. Oh, yes, there is no need to conceal it a moment from the world; and you can explain it to Marie Modeste. I shall send her to you immediately."

It was as if she were speaking to her professor of mathematics. His letter might have made it all different! He had offered the love of his lifetime, he had asked for love. Was she to give him duty, self-sacrifice? — And the *tête-à-tête* was coming to an end!

She stood a moment to steady herself on her high heels; the room was as private as a grave, as secret as her own heart at midnight; it was mysterious and still. She looked all around at the portraits on the wall, — portraits, not mir-

rors, — and, as it were a dream, she forgot all that she had been remembering for three months; forgot it all completely, deliciously. She turned to the sofa, but the notary had risen too; he had been standing at her side pleading, reproachful.

"*Mon ami.*" The lace sleeves fell back from the arms she held to him, all her heart trembled in her voice and looked through the tears in her eyes. "*Mon ami*, it is not so; do not believe it: it is not duty, Armand."

There was no one to see them or hear them. The birds outside were singing and the sun shining, the fresh new breezes rustling the trees, the cane sweetening, the roses resting in the shade; the negroes were working in the field, the women nursing and tending in the quarters; Marie Modeste was listening to curious prophecies from Marcélite; Mademoiselle Aurore was explaining to Monsieur Félix; Stasie was grumbling; Gabi was submitting to his delayed punishment from Edmond. The world had forgotten them; it was rolling on without them, or rather it had rolled back for them. She was seventeen, dreaming in the *allée*, under the oleanders, of love and a first lover. He was twenty-

five, rhyming sonnets in the moonlight, *à l'inconnue.* And the rapture that came to them then in a vision enfolded them now as they exchanged their first embrace.

"Of course, Eugénie, you know your own affairs best," said Mademoiselle Aurore. They were again on the gallery, the sunset again on the river. "As for me —" she shrugged her shoulders, leaving the rest of the sentence (in truth abortive in her own mind) to the imagination of Madame Lareveillère. A prolonged pause threatened the extinction of the subject of conversation. Mademoiselle Aurore resumed in a cool tone of voice and polite reserve of manner better calculated to extract embarrassing answers than information from the friend who sat helpless at her mercy. The tone and manner were a personal accomplishment, apparently not incompatible with her advanced degree of religiosity.

"Has he money, — your Monsieur, your *fiancé?*"

One never gets past blushing, it seems, at such terms, however perfectly the tongue can simulate coldness.

"He is not a beggar, nor a millionnaire: he has a certain income from his profession."

"And you are independent, Lareveillère left you so well provided for! He is a notary public, you said?"

"Yes, a notary public."

Their rocking-chairs rocked farther and farther apart, making intercommunication an effort. But there was no one on the gallery or about, and at a certain age mystery is presumed absurd, at least by Mademoiselle Aurore, as Madame Lareveillère acutely felt.

"And he lives on Royal Street?"

"Near St. Louis."

"Will you go there when — after the ceremony?"

"Yes, we will live in Royal Street."

"I beg your pardon! I am indiscreet."

"Not at all; it is no secret."

"I suppose your arrangements have been made some time."

"I assure you only since to-day."

"And when — the wedding? I implore you, do not answer unless you wish!"

"In November."

"November! So soon! But that is true, why waste time?"

"We only thought of that poor child Marie Modeste. You see, her home will be with us, naturally. There is so much to do, so many affairs to regulate, Madame Joubert taking the Institute —" Madame strove to make it ordinary, commonplace, quite a business arrangement; but whatever she said sounded apologetic to humiliation, and her eyes felt the obscurity of tears when they saw a thin smile on Mademoiselle Aurore's lips.

"It is hard for me to understand, — one like me, who never has been married at all;" the maiden lady raised her hands, the fingers extended as if from the touch of something unpleasant. "But I should think the presence of a young girl, *enfin!* — But you are never embarrassed, you! Only during the first few days of the — what is called (there is no other name for it, it is so ridiculous!) the honeymoon, she might be a little surprised, shocked even, not having seen anything of the conjugal state. I must confess for myself, there is a crudity —"

"No wonder, — no wonder," thought Madame,

"she never got married." In truth, her thoughts were very busy about her friend all the time, and may be credited with a gallant assault against an attachment which had so far proved impregnable to time.

"It is not *that*, Aurore, but," forcing herself resolutely to speak, "if you would let me leave her with you for a few days. If you would take care of her until we are arranged in the city. Monsieur Goupilleau advises it, and I — I know nothing better to propose. It is a favor I ask for her, for myself. I shall never forget it; indeed, it will lay me under the greatest obligations. Poor young girl! You understand it will be painful for her to go back to the school again."

"Eugénie! How can you doubt it? How can you ask?" When it came to a question of hospitality or friendship, Mademoiselle Aurore yielded to no one. "I was going to propose it myself! Did you think I would ever allow, ever consent to any other arrangement? The idea! It is the only thing natural, the only thing proper! I shall keep her here, and take her myself to the city when you are ready for her. As if I could not love a young girl as well as you or Marcélite!

Poor child, that is one of our war-claims! As for Marcélite, I can't tell you what I think of her conduct. It is heroic; it is sublime! Oh, she will never want a friend as long as I live, or Félix either! And Ninie," calling her by her old, school, pet name, abruptly changing the subject, leaving her chair, too, to get nearer her friend, "there is something you must not deny me, — indeed I have a right to insist upon it; I am sure you will not wound me by a refusal. I thought of it instantly; I have planned it all out; I have even announced it to Félix and Stasie." The thin little woman had gone back, back, in her life, far away from the present; where was she going to stop, in the sweet loveliness of her caressing manner and words? She was so delicate, so genuine!

"*Chérie*, you must remain here too, you must be married from Bel Angely, — from the home of your oldest, best friends, with your old sister Aurore to wait on you, to love you to the last — "

"Aurore! my angel! my treasure! Titite," — that was *her* little name. "It was my secret wish, my supreme desire! Ah, what a heart! What a friend!"

It was worth so much difference, so many differences, — the reconciliation; the crossing over from such a separation in their natures to meet again as they had started in life, heart open to heart, tongue garrulous to tongue, all revealed, understood, nothing concealed, — absolutely nothing. For there was a generous rivalry in loyal self-surrender and confession until Stasie again blew the horn for supper; and the feeble echoes returning quickly to the gallery, like aged birds after a short flight, put an end to the interview.

THE DRAMA OF AN EVENING.

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IT was carnival time of the year in New Orleans. The annual machinery of gayety had been set in motion: heavy, cumbersome, antiquated machinery, with etiquette, ceremony, precautions, and safeguards innumerable for the inflammable hearts transplanted from a tropical court to a tropical clime. It was the meeting-time of the year for the young people, the season for opportunity, the mating-time to come later in the spring, when the flowers twisted themselves naturally into bridal-wreaths, or in the early summer, when the mocking-birds sang all through the moonlight nights. In the wise little self-sufficient creole world there was no opportunity like that offered by a *soirée*. From time immemorial a *soirée* had been the official gate of entrance into the great world of society,

and this year Madame Fleurissant was to open the season,—Madame Edmond Fleurissant; for the last name had been so stretched that it embraced not individuals, but classes. The *soirée* was given to her grand-daughter, Stephanie Morel, who was to make her *début* into the great world out of the little world of school. Stephanie had not graduated; indeed, she was only in the second class; but Nature would not wait for the diploma of St. Denis. Nature is that way in New Orleans,—so impatient. A young girl must be very industrious there to get an education before her *début.*

From the time the invitations were sent out there had been nothing else talked about by the *débutantes.* The giddy little heads, still full of Mass, and still wet with the touch of holy water, would loiter, on their way from the cathedral, by the seductive shops, or come together outside the artificial-flower windows (rivalling the show within) to consult on the proper *parure* for the occasion. Field flowers, lilies of the valley, daisies, myosotis, and rosebuds, "rose tendre," the sweetest of all flowers for a *débutante,*—they bloomed, a miraculous spring, in

the confined laborariums, and but for the glass would have poured out over the damp stone *banquette*. The day of the intellect was felt to be over; it was the body which had to be furnished now. It was not only a question of artificial flowers, tulles and tarlatans, gloves, and slippers, but of pointed or round bodices, clinging or spread skirts. With Paris so far away, and American fashions so encroaching and so prosaic, what problem had their arithmetic ever furnished to compare with it?

The interest, which had been diffused to the extreme limits of the square of the city, as the original French settlement is called, began in reflex to return as the 27th of December approached, until with the day itself it hovered over a once fashionable neighborhood, now a *quartier perdu* given over to coffee-houses, oyster-stands, mattress-makers, and *chambres garnies* suspects, and finally concentrated on the old gray stucco building, — a by no means insignificant theatre of social festivities in that celebrated time long past, to which even a reference now is monotonous. As night fell, the venerable mansion arose through the darkness,

glittering with light, shedding a stately radiance over the humble roofs opposite, and shaming the social degradation of its whilom intimates and neighbors on each side. Both portals were opened for the reception of guests, — the great wide *porte-cochère* in front, and the back gate on the street in the rear. This gate had been thoughtfully propped open, that the hinges might not be injured or the mistress disturbed by the continual opening and shutting of another procession of guests,— the expected if uninvited, a not inconsiderable gathering from an old ostentatious superfluous retinue. Having come within the radius of the news that Madame Edmond was going to give a *soirée*, they, naturally considering their former intimate relations with the family, came to the *soirée* itself. Those who had ante-emancipation costumes of flowered mousseline-de-laine gowns, black-silk aprons, and real bandanna head-kerchiefs, put them on for volunteer service in the dressing-room. Those who had shawls put them on to hide toilet deficiencies, and also a prudently provided basket. Those victims of constitutional improvidence who had neither baskets nor shawls

came in untempered shiftlessness to gloat their eyes and glut their bodies on whatever chance might throw in their way. All entered alike boldly and assuredly, in the consciousness of their unabrogated funeral and festal privileges, inspected, with their heaven-given leisurely manner the provisions for refreshment, commented on the adornments, reconnoitred the rooms, and finally selected advantageous positions for observation behind the shutters of the ladies' dressing-rooms, or posted themselves in obscure corners of the hall. What sights to take home to their crowded shanties! And the sounds! Where could so many voices, so many emotions, be assembled as in a ladies' dressing-room before a *soirée*, — a début *soirée?*

"Have I too much powder?"

"Is my hair right so?"

"Does my dress show my feet too much?"

"Perhaps my comb would be better this way?"

"Shall I put a *mouche* just here?"

It is so important to look well on a début night. Everything depends upon that. Why, a wrinkle in a bodice, a flaw in a glove, a curl

this way or that, is enough to settle a destiny. No wonder they were nervous and excited. Self-confidence vanished as it had never done before, even in an "Histoire de France" contest at school. And in matters of toilet there is no such thing as luck. There seemed to be an idea that Fate could be propitiated by self-abnegation. The looking-glass extorted the most humble confessions.

"I am a fright!"

"As for me, I am perfectly hideous!"

"I told *maman* how it would be!"

"Now, it's no use!"

"It is that Madame Treize! ah, what a demon!"

"I can hardly stand in my slippers, they are so tight."

"And mine are so loose, — perfect ships."

"Ah, that Renaudière! the rascal!" came in chorus from all, for they all knew the shoemaker well.

"Just see what wretched gloves!"

"Look at my bodice! My dear, it was laced three times over, — the last time more crooked than the first."

In fact, there was not an article of dress, glove, shoe, or *parure* that answered expectations; not a *modiste* or *fabricant* of any kind that had not betrayed trust. And so restricted as they were to expression,—hardly daring to breathe under their laces or lift an eyebrow under their hairpins! Each one yielded unreservedly to her own panic, but strove to infuse courage into the others.

"*Chére*, you look lovely!" imprinting prudent little kisses in undamageable spots.

"You are so good, you only say that to console me."

"But I assure you, Doucette!"

"Ah, if I only looked as well as you!"

"What an exquisite toilet!"

"No, *chérie!* You can't conceal it, it is unbecoming!"

"But, on my word of honor!"

"My dear, it is not to flatter, but you look like an angel!"

"No, it is all over with me, I told *maman!* I did not wish to come."

"My hair is getting limp already."

The weather was really turning warm and moist, as if purposely to relax their curls.

The music commenced downstairs.

"Ah, that 's Benoit!"

And they fell into still greater trepidation over this exhibition of expenditure on their behalf.

"There 's going to be a crowd!"

"*Ah, mon Dieu!*" came from a despairing heart.

"Marcélite, my good Marcélite, put a pin here!"

"Marcélite, for the love of heaven tie this bow!"

"Marcélite, this string is broken!"

"See that big, fat quadroon! That is Marcélite Gaulois, the *coiffeuse*. She is the hairdresser for all the *haut ton*," whispered one of the knowing ones in the crowd outside the window.

"That must be her mamzelle, *hein*, — the tall one with the black hair?"

"Marcélite, I am so afraid," whispered Marie Modeste all the time.

"Zozo, you are the prettiest of all," or, "Zozo, your dress is the prettiest of all," was the invariable refrain.

"Must we go down now?"

"*Bonne chance, chère!*"

"Pray for me, *hein*, Marcélite?"

"And don't forget me, Marcélite!"

"Here, this is for good luck!" And with signs of the cross and exhortation they went downstairs into — not the parlors, that was not what frightened them, but the future, the illimitable future, that for which all their previous life had been a preface. One step more, it would be the present, and their childhood would be over.

From the time her carriage left her door, Madame Montyon had talked incessantly to her son, a handsome young man with a listless face, who was carefully seated in an opposite corner, out of the way of the never-an-instant-to-be-forgotten new velvet gown. What she intended to do, what she intended to say, what her listeners intended to do and say, — nay, what they intended to think! Always speaking and thinking consonant to her disposition, she evidently intended to carry her business to the ball, and had laid out her plans in consequence of some recent interview with her agent.

"I told Goupilleau, 'Goupilleau, nonsense! You don't know whom you are talking to! Can't get money out of this people! bah! Giving

balls, going to balls, and not pay house-rent, not pay office-rent, not even pay interest on their debts! debts reduced to ten cents on the dollar! But what are you singing to me, *mon ami?*' 'But Madame must not judge by the present.' 'And why not? Why not judge by the present?' 'The crises, the revolution, the reconstruction — ' 'La, la, la, you are too sympathetic. Goupilleau, my friend, let me tell you, you are no longer a notary, you are no longer an agent. You are a philanthropist, — a poetic philanthropist. Go coo with the doves, but don't talk business like that!' And Goupilleau knew I was right. I can read thought! One is n't a Duperre for nothing."

This was a well-known allusion to the fact that her father, General Duperre, a child of the Revolution in default of more illustrious ancestry, had distinguished himself once in a certain provincial trouble in France by his boundless sagacity and impregnable firmness.

The young man made a movement, but only with his foot.

"Take care! My dress! You will crush it! Black-velvet dresses cost money, and money is

not picked up under the foot of every galloping horse!" — whatever she meant by this favorite expression. "No, my son." She pronounced these words with a slight insistence on the "my," an assumption of motherhood that betrayed the pretender. "One must give a hand to one's own affairs. The eye of the master is very good, particularly when one employs lawyers.

"'Goupilleau,' I said, 'what of those stores on Chartres Street?'

"'Taxes, Madame.'

"'And the houses on Dumaine Street?'

"'Repairs, Madame.'

"'The Ste. Helena plantation?'

"'The freeze last year, Madame.'

"'The old Dubois — the old rascal! — plantation?'

"'Overflow, Madame.'

"'The brick-kiln over the river?'

"'Destroyed by fire, Madame.'

"'Goupilleau, you wrote me that that miserable wretch, that abominable hypocrite, old Gréaud, is broken-hearted, wants to commit suicide, bankrupt, and I don't know what all; and yet his daughter gets married, and orders her

trousseau from Paris (oh! don't take the trouble to deny it; I know it, I got it from my own dressmaker); and has such a wedding as the world has never seen!' 'Ah, Madame!' shrugging his shoulders," — shrugging hers too; she had been imitating his voice and manner all along in the dark, — "'it came from his wife, the mother of the young lady.' 'But, just heavens! Goupilleau.' I said, 'do you mean to tell me that what little God and the Government leave to me of my debts is to be hidden under the women's petticoats?' Well! I shall see for myself this evening. I am very glad the Grandmère Fleurissant gives this ball. Ah! I shall let them know!"

"I hope," said the young man, in a voice that expressed a very faint hope indeed, "you will be discreet; the creoles —"

"Bah! the creoles," contemptuously; "don't you think I know the creoles? They *are* creoles, remember, not Parisians."

It was hardly possible for him to forget a fact of which he had been reminded at almost every stroke of the clock since their departure from France.

"You forget that I, too, am a creole."

"Charles," — the voice came back suddenly, cold with offended dignity, — "you forget yourself; you must not speak so, I do not like it; in fact, you know it displeases me extremely;" and silence lasted now until the carriage stopped before the house, where, really, a policeman was very much needed, to keep not only the forward bodies of the *banquette* children, but also their impudent tongues, in order.

She had been going on to tell him much more, — about the "Succession d'Arvil," which, after all, had been the important reason of her coming to America; how the half-million she hoped from it was still buried in a mass of old paper, a regular rag-picker collection. "That Goupilleau — oh, Goupilleau! he is not the man he was; marriage has quenched him. He was still looking, looking, looking," — screwing up her eyes and handling bits of paper in her gloved hands, — "examining, comparing, as if in fact he held a contract from heaven to supply him with all the time he needed. Not one half of the papers gone through, and fully a month since he died, — old Arvil! It ought to

be at least a half-million!" She had suffered that amount of shame from him during his lifetime, it was worth half a million to appear as his niece now.

"But Goupilleau is so slow! I shall give him a talk to-morrow! I shall say 'so and so,' and he will say 'so and so.'"

Her irascibility once excited, eloquence flowed without bounds; her verbal castigation of the notary was satisfactory and complete, and the succession of her uncle hastened to a conclusion, — her own conclusion, a half-million. It would be a neat addition to Charles's heritage. "Charles!" her robust, strong nature melted over the name. Late in life her fortune had bought her the temporary possession of a husband but the permanent ownership of a child, — a beautiful little child, who had unlocked the passion of maternity in her. She was of the kind who are born to be mothers, not wives; who can do better without a husband than without children. As her old Uncle Arvil had hoarded money, so she hoarded this affection. As he had descended to base usages to obtain his desire, so had she descended to unworthy

measures for the monopoly of this one heart. The little boy had responded well to her efforts, had given her much, had forgotten much. But he had not given her all, and he had not forgotten the one whom to eradicate from his memory she would have bartered all her possessions, much as she loved them, — his own mother.

"*I* am your maman, Charles."

"You are my maman, but not my own maman." The childish verbal distinction became the menace of her life, the sentiment of his. And the dead mother, as dead mothers do, became a religion, while the living one remained a devotion.

She walked like a Duperre through the volleys of commentaries on the sidewalk. "Maman," said the young man in a low voice, as they mounted the steps, "be discreet, I implore you."

"Bah!" was the answer; and then he began to regret that he had not sought an excuse to stay away. He was as sensitive as she was obtuse, and there seemed to be no escape from impending ridicule. He placed himself out of

the way of the dancers, against the wall; condemned by his forebodings to be an observer of, rather than a participant in, the pleasures of the evening.

The antique gilt chandeliers festooned with crystal drops lighted up the faded, as they had once lighted up the fresh, glories of the spacious rooms. Gilt candelabra with fresh pink-paper *bobèches* branched out everywhere to assist in the illumination, — from the door, the windows, the arches, and under the colossal mirrors, which were sized to reflect giants. Old magnificences, luxuries, and extravagances hovered about the furniture, or seemed to creep in, like the old slaves at the back gate, to lend themselves for the occasion; even in a dilapidated, enfranchised condition, good, if for nothing else, to propitiate present criticism with suggestive extenuations from the past. As the parlors with their furniture, so were many of the chaperons with their toilets. There were no reproaches of antiquity to be passed between them. But the good material had remained intact with both, and the fine manners which antedated both furniture and clothes, and to an observer obliter-

ated them, establishing a charming and refreshing supremacy of principals over accessories.

"Ninety years old!"

"Ninety!" exclaimed Tante Pauline. "Ninety-two, if you believe me; I know well!"

Every one naturally said the same thing, coming away from the venerable hostess. Tante Pauline, who was aunt only by courtesy to every one in the room, had constituted herself a kind of breakwater to turn the tide of compliment into truth. She was in an admirable position, near the door.

"How can she be so malicious!" thought the young married woman standing by her side, adjusting her eye-glasses for another look about the room.

It was well she did, for she was so near-sighted she would never have seen the candle-grease dripping down over a *bobèche* upon a young man's coat.

She made a motion to speak, then hesitated, then, with some mental admonition to courage, —

"Monsieur, you are standing under the drip of a candle."

"*Ma foin!*" she thought, "he is *distingué*,

good-looking, and young. Why does n't he dance? If I knew his name I could introduce him. In fact, if I knew him I could talk to him myself."

"Ah! I can tell you, my maman went to school with her youngest daughter, and then she was a woman; a woman of a very certain age in society."

The tall, angular, Tante Pauline talked all the time, shrugging her shoulders under her thin *glacé*-silk waist, tapping her sandal-wood fan, and gesticulating with her bony hands, in their loose black silk mittens.

"Ninety! Who would think it?"

"It is a miracle!"

"And so charming, so *spirituelle!*"

"A beautiful ball! Really like old times."

"Eh, Odile!" Tante Pauline spread her fan (rusting spangles on a ground of faded red silk) to shield what she was going to say to her companion.

"She ought to know how to give balls! She has given enough of them. That is the way she married off six daughters."

"Tante Pauline!"

"Of course, and evaded paying the *dot* with every single one of them," emphasizing each syllable. "What do you think of that, *hein?* Oh, she has a head for business. She has plenty of money to give balls."

"Who can he be, Tante Pauline?" asked Odile, looking towards the young man whose coat she had rescued.

"Eh!" The sharp eyes screwed under their brows. "But what specimen is that? I can't place him. *Ma chère*, how foolish, but don't you see whom he is looking at? But look over there! there!" and she pointed with a long knotted finger. "Black velvet, diamonds, marabout feathers. Ah, what a masquerade! a whole *Mardi-gras*. But, Odile, how stupid of you! Madame Montyon, *enfin;* that is her son, — her step-son, I should say."

"Ah!" said Odile, with a vivid show of interest; "just from France!"

"Of course, my dear. Have you not heard? But where have you been all this week? Come over on business, to buy out or sell out, Heaven knows what!—all of us poor creoles who owe her a picayune. And then there is the Arvil suc-

cession, too. Who knows what a hole that will make in our poor city? Poor old New Orleans! But just look at her, my dear; did you ever see such airs? Ah, well! I don't wonder Laflor Montyon died. I remember him well, as if he were of yesterday. I must confess it served him right; he married her for money," she laughed maliciously, "but he only got her: the money was kept well out of his embraces; and very wisely, for Laflor was a fool about money. Poor Mélanie! She would turn in her grave to know who had had the raising of her baby. And what does he look like, after all?" with a disparaging glance at the young man. "A Parisianized creole! An Americanized creole is bad enough, but a Parisianized — good-day! Why does he not dance? Why can he not play the polite to the young girls? Does he think perhaps that he is too good for us, — that we are savages, barbarians! That old paper-shaving Arvil! buying, buying, buying, — always secretly; and hiding, hiding it all away in his rat-hole, a perfect miserable caboose, under the mattress. No wonder he lived so long. Death hated to go there for him! And the clothes he wore! We will not even

allude to them. Well, he did die and was buried, and then, *grand coup de théâtre*, Madame turns out to be his niece and heiress. The rich, the elegant, the aristocratic Madame Montyon, with her château in France, the niece of old 'rag-picker' Arvil, as we used to call him. And he, our disdainful young man, will get it all. Ha! ha! ha! Ah, the poor creoles! She wiped the tears of merriment from her eyes with a thin saffron-colored handkerchief, a sharer of the sandal-wood perfume of the fan. But surely, Odile, you have heard all this?"

"I don't say no, Tante Pauline." Odile spoke with indifference; she was in truth a little disconsolate. Her husband had brought her into the room and planted her there at the beginning of the *soirée;* she had not seen him since. As for beaux, they had bidden her farewell the night of her marriage, as the beaux of discreet brides always do. But her discretion did not preserve her from *ennui* now.

"Excuse me, Madame, but it is broken!" and she warned for the fourth or fifth time some fatigued dowager off an incapacitated chair, which stood in a conspicuous place by warrant

of its great age and beauty, — an ornamental *guet-apens.*

"Ninety — *Bonté divine!*"

"Odile," Tante Pauline interrupted her asseveration, "just look at Goupilleau and his wife, — the newly-married ones! Goupilleau! Heavens, what a name! Poor old Lareveillère! he was an aristocrat, at least. They say — ah, I don't know," and her shoulders began to rise again with serpentine motions from her far-distant waist, — "they say he has adopted that young girl. Well, it is n't my affair; but what can you expect, since the war?"

"Well, well, my dear, are you amusing yourself?" Odile's husband came through the door at her back. He always carefully spoke English in public, being what Tante Pauline called "an Americanized creole;" his wife, as carefully, spoke French.

"As you see," shrugging her frail shoulders out of her low-necked waist.

"Ah, one soon gets past all this!" He spoke like an old, old married man; this was another of his affectations. She turned her head and gave a quick side-glance at him with her lan-

guid oval eyes. It was not so very long ago since she, too, was dancing out on the floor there, a young girl, he a young man, — dancing, with the honeymoon in their distant horizon, gayly and thoughtlessly as any. They had reached and passed it. What is one moon to a year of matrimony? She wore her wedding-gown this evening, fresh still, with only the seams taken up. He was stouter, bluffer, wore his coat carelessly, left a button out of his vest. "Who is the young coxcomb?" So he designated the young man who was still in fixed contemplation of the décolletée black-velvet dress and marabout feathers.

"Young Charles Montyon. I find him quite *comme il faut*, on the contrary."

"He has a confounded supercilious air."

"I admire it; I would like to know him."

"Benoit is playing well this evening." Her husband nodded toward the piano, behind which the dark bold head of the colored pianist could be seen in passionate movement.

"Ah, he ought to play well," chimed in Tante Pauline, "he asks enough; but really, his prices are enormous. And I am not the only one who

is wondering how the Fleurissants can afford it; when you think of poor Caro Fleurissant making her living embroidering for a few miserable picayunes. But then they say Benoit gives half to his old mistress. In fact, she would starve without it. Well, some women are fortunate to have people work for them! Eh, Henri?"

But Henri Maziel had left; indeed, he had not waited beyond the last word of his own remark.

"I do not think we can compliment Henri Maziel on his manners," whispered Tante Pauline, under the perfumed shelter of her fan, to her left-hand neighbor. "Poor Odile! but she would marry him; she was warned enough! I heard she threatened to kill herself or go in a convent. The threats of a girl of seventeen — bah! And that is what is called having a husband!"

The young girls danced as only young girls can dance, to Benoit's music, — with no past behind them to weigh down their light feet, and no future before them but of their own manufacture; danced round and round in the circle bounded by the rows of darkly-clad chaperons,

as if they did not see them, their anxious, calculating faces, their sombre-hued bodies, or their sombre-hued lives; danced in the frank, joyous exuberance of youth on its first entrance into the "great world." Their tulle and tarlatane skirts spread wider and wider in the breeze from their own motions, until they stood out like full-blown roses, showing the little high-heeled slippers underneath playing as lightly on the floor as Benoit's fingers on the piano. Bunches and crowns of artificial flowers were pinned on their quick-moving, restless heads. Their fresh, young, bending, curving bodies swelled under the tightly-laced satin bodices. Eighteen, seventeen, sixteen, — they were not out a moment too soon. Over their books, over their dolls even, their majority had come to them, — their fragile dower of beauty, the ancestral heritage of the women, held in mortmain from generation to generation. Type came out strongly under the excitement. In their languid, dormant creole lives it had held feature and character tenaciously; to southern, to northern France, to Spain, to Italy, with faint tinges from Semitic or Anglo-Saxon influences. The newly-bloomed faces

were varied, unconventional, changing, with nothing regular, nothing perfect, nothing monotonous in them, presenting constant surprising, piquant variations on the usual coloring and features, with exotic exaggerations and freaks in both, which permitted little audacities of toilet, risks in *coiffure*, originality in bows; they walked, spoke, were graceful, fascinating, and charming, *grandes dames*, by inspiration or tradition, as the grammatical but ill-spelling court of Louis XIV. talked.

Their timidity had left them, self-confidence had returned. Naïvely proud of their new *trousseaux*, of looks and clothes, they dispensed their favors with prodigal generosity, unconscious of their own wastefulness; experimenting with looks and smiles and winsome address; using their dangerous woman-eyes with childish hardihood; charging their transparent little phrases with expressions of which life had not yet taught them the significance.

They were, without doubt, now delighted with themselves. They could not keep from looking up at the mirrors, as they passed in promenade, twirling with Cuban agility their scintillating

plumed fans. And the old mirrors, at times, could hardly contain between their gilded frames the upturned, flower-crowned, questioning faces. They did not indorse each other now, or ask indorsement; they had already journeyed too far in their feminine tactics.

The breath-laden air, mounting warmer and warmer, seemed to brighten the Cupids and the flowers painted on the ceiling. The white lint from the drugget floated around like pollen in autumn in search of flower-hearts to fructify. One could not look across the room without traversing the dazzling electricity shooting from eye to eye.

"Ah, they are very happy, Madame Edmond!" said her old beau, with a sigh.

"Or they think they are, which is sufficient," answered the old lady.

"Oh, no, they do not think. The more one thinks the less one laughs. Hear them laugh!"

Out in the hall was the punch-bowl, and out in the hall were the fathers and uncles, and all the old, old gentlemen who are neither fathers nor uncles, but who come to balls simply be-

cause they cannot stay away. They complimented one another's families, talked Alphonse Karr and Lamartine, repeated sharp truths from Thiers or blunt ones from Guizot between their sips of punch, and in the neutral garb of their dress-coats discussed moderately, republicans, royalists, and imperialists, the politics of France. They made periodical excursions into the parlors, where their old hearts (grown torpid in the monotonous decorum of married life), warming at the sight of so much beauty and the taste of punch, grew lusty, and were eager to fall in love again — with one another's grand-daughters.

"How *gentille* she is, — that little Stephanie Morel!"

"A perfect *bonbon!*"

"It's a family trait. '*La gentille Fleurissant,*' as we used to say, eh, Auguste?"

"*Aïe!* It hurts me still!" and the old victim laid his wrinkled hand over the sepulchre of his defunct heart.

"Ah, coquette! coquette!" A warning finger was shaken at a passing belle.

"You do not tell me that is the daughter of—"

"The daughter! Come! You are posing for youth; the *grand*-daughter, it is, of your old flame."

"They grow with a rapidity,—a rapidity, these young girls!"

"Ah, they do not wish to wait until their grand-mamans have wrinkles!"

"Bah! women are such coquettes, they do not wrinkle any more."

"That is true. *Mon Dieu!* just look at them!"

"They have not changed in the least,—only the fashion of their dresses."

"As for that, the fashions are no longer what they used to be. The grace, the charm of the old ball dresses!"

"And the *coiffures!*"

"The *coiffures* of the present! look at them,—monstrous exaggerations!"

"When it comes to *coiffures*, what will not a pretty woman put on her head!"

"Or an ugly one!"

"Ugly! no, *mon cher*, there are none."

"Do you remember Madame de Pontalba, when—"

"Apropos of *coiffures*, that anecdote Alphonse

Karr relates, ha! ha! ha!" The anecdotes crossed.

"It was Monsieur de Pontalba."

"No, it was Madame de Pontalba."

"The hairdresser of Madame Récamier, ha! ha! ha!"

"Briant was there at the time, — Auguste Briant, — and he told me — "

"The hairdresser looked around and saw, imagine — ha! ha!"

"Madame de Pontalba said, 'Monsieur!'"

"A white object on a chair — "

"She was never the same again."

"And that was the *coiffure* she wore, ha! ha! ha! ha!"

"Goupilleau! Goupilleau!" Madame Montyon walked up like a brigadier and ordered the notary out like a soldier from the ranks. One could easily imagine a brigadier uniform under the new black-velvet gown, — sword, epaulettes, spurs, and all; and the marabout feathers in her hair waved over a face that would have suited a *képi*.

"Goupilleau, I cannot believe it! That Madame Flotte maintains — "

"To-morrow morning, my dear lady, in my office, I shall be entirely at your service."

"No, no! Now! Come to her; tell her yourself!"

"In my office, to-morrow —"

"No! now!" And they walked away together, she victorious, as usual.

"Ha! ha! ha! ha! Ho! ho! ho! ho!"

"Hear that old '*Jean qui rit*' still laughing over his Madame Récamier story."

"No! no! Ho! ho!" The old gentleman's extended mouth cut a semicircle in his soft, round, beardless face. "Ho! ho! ho! ho! That Providence! What a *farceur*, my friends! For a *jeu d'esprit* there is no one like him. To the *sans-culotte* father he sends a pantalooned daughter, — ha! ha! ha!"

When the arrivals entirely ceased, the lookers-on upstairs, the back-door guests, had to advance their positions to be at all repaid for the trouble of peeping. Like shadows they crept out on tiptoe from their hiding-places to hang over the banisters and look down on the exalted, God-favored world below, their eager eyes catching the light and shining strangely

out of the darkness of their faces. The hair-dressers and maids, in virtue of their superior appearance, had the privilege of the steps all the way down to the floor beneath. They sat, their bright bandanna heads looking like huge posies, exchanging their bold, frank, and characteristically shrewd comments on their whilom masters and mistresses. What did they not know of the world in which destiny had placed them in the best of all possible positions for observation? What had been two low, dim, or secret for them as slaves to crawl into? From their memory or experience, as they sat there, what private archives of their city might not have been gathered, — the snarls and tangles, the crossings and counter-crossings of intrigue, the romances dipped in guilt, the guilt gilded with romance, the tragedies from the aspiring passions of some, the degrading passions of others, and all the impurities from common self-indulgence, with indestructible consequences to stalk like ghosts through the pleasant present! Their school had well taught them the strength and weakness of Nature, the baseness and nobility of humanity. Under-

standing the problems of the heart better than those of the head, they translated them into the unveiled terms of their intimate language, giving free vent to their versions and theories, but aggressively in their loyal partisanship and their obstinate servility to family and name. It was a pleasure to look up and see them, to catch a furtive greeting or a demonstration of admiration. Their unselfish delight in the enjoyment of others gave a consecration to it.

"I warrant you, Madame Morel has courage, — a little baby at home, and introducing a young lady in society."

"Look at Madame Edmond's old beau, Monsieur Brouy! He looks like a Papa Noël."

"*Hé!* that *grand seigneur* Benoit drinking off his champagne!"

"Brought him on a silver waiter!"

"*C'est ça des manières!*"

"Benoit has luck!"

"No, Benoit has what they call genius!"

"He is not the worst-dressed person in the room, either!"

"Why not? He was educated in Paris! He should dress well and play well too!"

"It is his old Madame who is proud now, *hein?*"

"Look, look my children, look! Madame Montyon!" They all craned their necks to see.

"Madame Montyon!"

"Eh, but what finery!"

"What airs!"

"Madame is Parisian now! she is not a common creole! Oh, no! she had to bring white servants with her from Paris. She cannot stand the color!"

"Well! She has not grown younger nor prettier."

"Poor Monsieur Laflor! No wonder he shot himself!"

"Shot himself? He took poison."

"But my old master was there."

"So was mine — in Paris."

"But he did not 'suicide' at all! He died of apoplexy. I was there myself. I went to the funeral," protested a third.

"Of course they said that to deceive the priest, but he 'suicided' all the same."

"*Ah, ça!* But you must n't abuse politeness! You can't come on the stairs! Look over as

much as you please, but not to be seen, *hein?*" One of the women of the house spoke sharply to the crowd above.

"It's not me! It's not me!" came a score of whispers; "it's Nourrice!"

"Nourrice! For the love of—"

"Eh, poor devil! But let her come, Olympia," came in antistrophe from the crowd on the steps. "She'll soon go away; she never stays long."

"Here, Nourrice! here!"

"By me, Nourrice!"

"Here's a nice place for you, Nourrice!"

The kind-hearted women moved this way and that to find a place for her on the steps.

Two long, thin, naked, yellow feet, caked with mud, came down the steps, feeling their way over the carpet, and an old woman stiffly sat in the corner offered, tucking her ragged, soiled skirt about her, and drawing her piece of shawl over her breast. Her arms were bare, and the elbow-joints projected sharply. Her kerchief seemed to have worn in holes on her head; the gray wool stuck out everywhere, like moss from an old mattress. She had drifted in from the

street through the back gate, in her rags, her dirt, and her mendicancy, like some belated bug attracted from the distant swamps to the gaslight.

They began to joke her in a rough, good-natured way.

"*Hé!* but, Nourrice, you love balls still?"

"Like old times, *hein*, Nourrice?"

"You could show them how to dance, Nourrice?"

"Who used to run off to the balls at night, Nourrice?" for they all knew her, — a character famous for escapades in the old times.

But the old woman paid as little attention to them as if she had not heard them. The lips of her sunken mouth, into which all the wrinkles of her face converged, were glued together; and so the comments resumed their way without regard to her.

"Whom is she dancing with there, — that little Mamzelle of the Goupilleaus?"

"Eh! but she 's not pretty!"

"Not pretty? Mamzelle Motte not pretty? *Ah, par exemple!*" Marcélite's voice took another tone from that in which she had criticised others.

"*Chut!* it is her Mamzelle!"

"Here is Madame la Grande-Duchesse again." They had all been attendants on the opera-bouffe, and could fix a title on Madame Montyon as well as any one.

"She has not got any prettier, that's the truth!"

"Nourrice! Nourrice!" shaking her by the shoulder, "look, look — your old mistress!"

"A nice old mistress, *vas!*"

"A mistress who was too good to own slaves; she had to sell them."

"Madame had susceptibilities; Madame was a Parisian, not a creole."

"*Hé!* Nourrice, that's the God's truth, is n't it? She sold you?"

"Sold the nurse of her baby, — *Seigneur!*"

"It was not her baby; it was the first one's baby."

"That's the reason she was jealous, — jealous of Nourrice;" and they all laughed except Nourrice herself, who pressed her thin fingers over her mouth and looked on the crowd below.

"And the little boy, the young man, where is he?"

"Oh, but I would like to see him, — Monsieur Florval."

"Florval? Charles, you mean."

"It is you who do not know what you are talking about; his name is Charles Florval."

"Ask Nourrice; she knows."

"She used to nurse him; he was the apple of her eye, poor wretch!" one whispered, pointing to Nourrice.

"I remember him well. Such a temper! a perfect little devil! but Nourrice could always manage him."

A late comer, a very late comer, ascended the stairs, and they all stood up to let him pass. He walked as if hurrying from a danger, his large blond face exhibiting the nervous panic of a bashful man, — a panic not assuaged by the coolly critical eyes that scanned him up the long way, — eyes that were pitiless to anything like a social infirmity.

"But who is he?"

"*Pas connais li.*"

"Not one of us, sure," meaning creoles.

"An American from up-town."

"Some rich American," corrected another.

He soon descended; the nervousness driven from his face to his hands, — great, stout hands, which worked incessantly, smoothing his white gloves, the sleeve of his coat, and travelling up to his cravat. He avoided the gaze of the women, betraying a fatal cowardice, and made his way, through the old gentlemen around the punch-bowl, to the parlors. He was, in fact, a débutant. No young girl could have been more overcome on entering the room than he; no one could have felt more helpless and bashful; no one could have more excusably yielded to the strong temptation to flight. He felt awkward in his new clothes, not one article of which was an acquaintance of more than an hour's standing: he was vexed that their delay in coming had postponed his arrival at the ball until such an ostentatiously late hour; and the people all around him were as new as his clothes. His long quiet evenings at the plantation, after the hard day's work, came up before him. There he was at ease; there he was master; there, on the finest plantation in St. James's Parish, he was in a position to inspire, not feel, a panic. He remained at the door stock-still under the charm

of retrospection, until some deputy of the Fleurissant family, all apologies and fine speeches, put an end to the uncomplimentary position. According to etiquette he was taken around the circle and introduced to every individual, chaperon and relative, composing it.

"Monsieur Morris Frank."

"Monsieur Maurice Frank."

"Monsieur Maurice Frank."

"Of the Parish of St. James."

"Of the Ste. Marie plantation of the Parish of St. James."

The repetition, reinforcing name with title, title with name, accumulated such a deposit of self-esteem, that at the end of it he could really assume the air of a young proprietor with a large bank-account, — the air which distinguished the plantationless, bank-accountless young scions about him.

"From St. James, you say, — from St. James, Monsieur Fleurissant? What a chance! He may know something of an old friend of mine, a particular friend, Monsieur Deron, — Philippe Deron, of the Ste. Helena plantation."

The dance was still going on, — the soft, light

dresses crushing up against him, the bare arms grazing him, and the white necks everywhere, like the dropping petals of the Malmaison roses from the vine on his gallery at home. He had to move this way and that, to keep out of the waltz.

"Monsieur Deron, — Philippe Deron?"

At first he could only bow low and reverentially, with blushes of pleasure. His language could not come on the instant, before such a volume of black velvet and a diamond necklace, that was so beautiful it charmed the beholders into admiration of the neck it encircled, and puffy marabout feathers, like his own tender ducklings at home, in her hair.

"Monsieur Philippe Deron?"

His face lighted with pleasure at the ease of the reply: "Philippe Deron? Intimately; his plantation is next to mine."

"And his crop, — his crop last year?"

"Superb."

"Superb? Ah, you see that! The fox! Where is Goupilleau? Goupilleau must hear that! Come with me; we will find Goupilleau. You just tell Goupilleau that. A superb crop!

Ah, I have caught you this time, my friend Deron!"

"Mademoiselle Pauline Ruche —"

The introducer had reached the end of the circle, when Madame Montyon prevented the pleasure about to be expressed on both sides by carrying one of the participants bodily away.

"Goupilleau! listen! Ah, that Deron! what turpitude!"

The patience as well as the politeness of even a notary, however, can come to an end.

"To-morrow morning, at ten o'clock, in my office." Monsieur Goupilleau was firm and silent after these words.

"Montyon manners! The manners of a policeman, my dear, absolutely," explained Tante Pauline to her companion, whom fate had only released by intervals from her depressing lonesomeness.

"That is the way with those *révolutionnaires*. They come from the depths; not from the *bourgeoisie*, my dear, but from the people, — the people." And she pronounced these words with the unique expression of contempt which she conscientiously reserved for them.

"That young man! He is a new beau, evidently. Just come in, you say? Well, better late than never. What stature! The other men look like dwarfs. Ah! our creole blood is degenerating; we have no more men, only manikins. He is a stranger; he must be a German, he is so fair. He is a nobody, too; a blind person could see that! What can the old Montyon want with him? She has no daughter to marry, —'only a son.' But look, Odile! Our Parisian is at last caught. You see that little creature, that little Motte! Don't tell me that Eugénie Lareveillère is not an *intriguante!* Oh, she knows how to manage. He is a *parti*, my dear, —a *parti;* no one can deny that. The only *parti* in the room. Goupilleau? *Mon Dieu!* when a woman has been Lareveillère for fifty years, who can 'Goupilleau' her all of a sudden? Ah, see there! She goes rapidly; our young creole girls are learning from the Americans the art to flirt. [*Flurrter*, she pronounced it.] You know it means for the young lady to pretend to be in love, in order to induce the young man to be so in reality. What! Odile's husband? Henri Maziel? Not a cent, my dear."

She turned to her interlocutor on the left. "He is drawing the devil by the tail, I hear." (*Il tire le diable par la queue.*)

"Not a cent!" She had said it of almost every one in the room, not from default of imagination, but from the monotonously truthful, unfortunate circumstances.

"The *on dit*," — Tante Pauline suddenly remembered that she had let a precious subject pass without relating all she knew about it, — "the *on dit* about this young girl, — you must have heard it. Odile, you have heard it, have you not? Quite romantic; of course, they tried to hush it. Very naturally; but it is the truth, nevertheless. I see nothing in it to be ashamed of, or, of course, I would not repeat it. Madame Hirtemont told me she got it from Artémise, the *coiffeuse*, — Artémise Angely, you remember; she belonged to Amènaïde Angely. Well — "

"Tante Pauline!" — the fan was tapping away: the young married woman extended her hand and arrested it, — "for the love of Heaven do not repeat that silly story! It is so absurd — and justice to the poor young lady.

Besides, remember how kind Eugénie Goupilleau has always been to you."

"If it is a story, there is no harm in repeating it. I don't say positively it is the truth. Silly! It is not silly, even if it were true."

She resented bitterly any imputation of maliciousness. Her kind heart repudiated any desire to do evil. She talked simply with the vague idea of affording gratification. She was also proud of her reputation of knowing everybody and everything, and desired to sustain it. So, to prove her perfect disinterestedness, and to leave it to the impartiality of her hearers, she related all the circumstances from the beginning, — from the very beginning, where Artémise, the *coiffeuse*, had been called in to comb Madame Lareveillère for a grand concert and distribution of prizes. "And such an *éclaircissement*, my dear, about Eugénie's toilet mysteries," etc., carrying her story successfully and fluently to the end. "Although the Mottes are of good family, best creole blood. Marie Modeste Viel was at the convent the same time as I, — the old Ursulines' Convent. Your mother was there too, Odile. She was pretty

enough, but delicate, and so *gnian, gnian*," uttering the criticism with appropriate grimace and intonation.

"Alphonse Motte was a very nice young man, quite *comme il faut.* Not over-burdened with intelligence, however, or he would have seen how delicate she was; every one else knew that she could not live long. Oh, the daughter has lost nothing by being at the Goupilleaus'! It was very kind of old Armand Goupilleau to take her in. He 's no relation, — at least, not that I know of;" which effectually decided the matter for her hearers, human certainty of knowledge not going in New Orleans beyond that possessed by Mademoiselle Pauline Ruche.

The story, as water by capillary attraction, soaked farther and farther away from the fountain-head, making the tour of the room as exactly as Mr. Morris Frank had done; going from one to another until all had become permeated with it to such an extent that each one felt authorized to issue a private version from such facts as her own eyes could see, her own ears hear, and her own intelligence logically suggest, with the young girl in ques-

tion dancing before them in a fluttering white dress, with a crown of blue myosotis on her black hair, her face beautiful in her complete self-surrender to the joy of the passing moment, her partner making no attempt to conceal his admiration.

"He is really the only *parti* in the room."

"Yes, he has money; he can marry."

"He 's welcome to it at that price, — the father running away from his country during a war. It is not a Villars who could do that."

"This was it! This was happiness!" Since she had worn long dresses Marie had caught it every now and then. In the fragment of a dream or in one of those fleeting day-moments that shoot like meteors at times across the serenity of a young girl's mind, diffusing a strange, supernatural sensation of causeless bliss, passing away with a sigh, — the absent-minded, causeless sigh of young girls, who, when asked about it, answer truthfully, "I do not know, it came just so;" a sensation of bliss which their age does not permit them to understand, but which they recognize distinctly afterwards, when it comes at the proper time;

and then they feel that they have lived and known this moment ages before.

All around Marie Modeste were dancing her school companions, young ladies now, — and she was a young lady too! — almost disguised one from another in their beauty and mature manner. Could that be Elmina, who had passed hours in the corner with a foolscap on; and Loulou, who had almost wept her eyes away over faults of orthography; and Ernestine, who had monopolized the leathern medal; and Gabrielle, who had waged a persistent war, a perfect siege of Troy in duration, against her music-teacher; and all those who had passed out of the gates of St. Denis before her, year after year, graduated into the then far-distant great world? These did not dance, but walked around with the languid movements and pre-occupied eyes of young matrons. "What a bright, what a beautiful world! Was there ever a dark day in it? Was it ever so bright or so beautiful to any one before?" So they all thought, each one dancing in a fresh, new, original creation, — a special paradise, full for each one to name and classify. Her first illu-

sion goes when the young girl finds her own Eden neither the brightest nor the best, nor an individual creation; the last goes when she finds that she is not the only woman in it, but that Eves are under every tree.

When they looked at anything, they looked at themselves in the mirrors, or at their partners, not at the crow's-feet and wrinkles which had travelled from the hearts to the faces of the débutantes of twenty-five years ago, the possessors, then, of a paradise too.

The young girls had of course consulted the *bonne aventure* about him, — the future one whom they hoped to meet this or some other near evening. Was he to be fair or brown, tall or short, widower or bachelor? Candles were even now burning before distant altars to hasten his coming, placed by the zealous hands of some of those very nurses out on the stairs; the saints were being arraigned, perhaps, by some of the impatient mother-spectators about him; all to be forgotten in the supreme moment by the most interested ones! Quadrilles, *deux-temps*, and waltzes succeeded one another; but the heedless young girls thought only of the pleas-

ure of the dance, forgetting the profit. How could they do otherwise, with that new blood beating in their veins, and new life bursting in their hearts under the forceful music of Benoit, — that warm, free, full, subtilely sensualized African music? The buds themselves would have burst into blossom under the strains, and the little birds anticipated spring.

"Ah, what a beautiful world it is! How good it is to live! How good God is!"

And it came about as Marie Modeste danced with the young "Parisianized creole;" it is so inexplicable, so indescribable; to state it destroys the delicacy of it; to confess it almost vulgarizes it; but an impression was made on their fresh, impressionable hearts, slight and faint, easy to efface or subdue, but more easily kept alive and fixed. Neither knew — how could they? it was the first time — what it was. A change came over the charm upon her; a dissatisfaction crept into the young girl's heart; her pleasure all departed. When she spoke, it was to perceive that she was silly; she became conscious of marked inferiority in her appearance; she was wearied; and when she looked in

the mirror now, it reflected not her face but her mood. And he, seeing the light pass from her face, became self-accusing, self-depreciative, and taciturn; his life became a hateful barren to look back upon, his stepmother an intolerable irritant whom he wished to deny before Marie.

When the time came for them to part, they both started, as if being together were a sudden impropriety. She had not a glance to encourage him in her embarrassment. He followed her upstairs to the dressing-room without a word to retrieve himself with, so absorbed in the new sensation that he stumbled over an old negro woman who had apparently forgotten, in her enjoyment of the scene, to take herself away with the rest.

Her companions it was that had forgotten to drive her away into the back-yard for supper, or into the back-street for shelter. The music crept through her brain like soft fingers through her matted, knotted, massed hair, loosening the tangles in her half-crazy mind. "How would she know him, they were all so much alike, the young men, and all dressed the same?"

"My little heart. My little love. My little

kiss. My little soul." A long-buried litany of diminutive tenderness, the irrepressible cajoleries of colored creole nurses; she kept her fingers pressed tight against her lips; not a word of the myriads that teemed in her heart disturbed the scented, warm atmosphere. She nodded at times, and dreamed she was at the bedside of a patient. The lace-lined trains of tired ladies on their way to the dressing-room swept over her. At the sound of every man's step she would raise her head alertly, and the gleam in her eye would transfuse the white film that obscured it.

A little boy with black hair which she used to curl, black eyes which she used to kiss, and lace petticoats! If he would only come up the stair that way! Oh, he will know me! He will do me justice! He will give me satisfaction for all, — all! His poor old Nourrice! His nigger! His dog! His Patate!

Her menial heart, which had cast tendernesses on her nursling, cast humiliations on herself. Her thoughts flew like martins back to old times, and there dallied and rested. She was no longer the eccentric old beggar Nourrice, the bedfellow

of street curs, the ravager of garbage-barrels, but a pampered, spoiled nurse, the unmanageable, the wild, the reckless quadroon, of a wild, reckless period. Some one stumbled over her; she caught hold of the baluster and pulled herself up, instinct with old servile apology. Bidden by the same impulse that had brought her there, she followed after, close to the footsteps of the young man, stretching out her arms to catch him, to detain him.

"I know you! I know you! It 's God did it, — God!"

She had caught him somehow; half pulling, half pushing, had got him through the open door to the dark gallery behind.

"Your Nourrice! Your poor old Nourrice!"

He had not pronounced the word in twenty years. "Nourrice." It meant then a world of solicitude, — protection from danger, covering from cold, food when hungry, drink when thirsty, a cooling, a soothing, a lullaby, a great strong, dark bulwark to fly to, a willing Providence in reach of baby arms. He stretched out his arms again at the word; they reached far over the limp, mal-odorous object at his feet.

"It 's God sent you, — God!"

He felt her lips, a soft, humid, toothless mass, pressing again and again on his hands. Beyond her, over the irregular roofs and chimneys and balconies, the skies stretched full of hot, gleaming, Southern stars; the music from the piano, the chattering voices in the dressing-room, filled the gallery. She kept raising her voice louder and louder, for her own dull ears to hear the epitome of her sufferings; he could hear plainly enough.

"Little master! I've no home, no bed, no food, no nothing. I'm 'most naked! I'm 'most starved!"

The heart-rending sob of human desperation broke her voice.

"Nourrice! Poor old Nourrice! Patate!"

It was an inspiration, — his recollection of the old nickname. God must have ordered it with the rest.

"Patate! You haven't forgotten 'Patate'? Saviour!"

Her tears began to fall; they should have been soiled, wrinkled, bleared, and distorted. from such eyes. "I am not lazy, little Master!

I have worked and worked! but God knows I am too old. I was an old woman when I nursed you. I can hardly see, I can hardly hear, I can hardly stand; and I am sick, I am diseased."

"I've no home, no bed, no food, no nothing!" she repeated. "The little children run after me in the street, they throw dirt at me; '*Hé! la folle! la folle!*'" raising her voice in piercing imitation of their cruelty. "The little nigger children, — the rottenness of the earth! I fall in the gutters! The policemen drag me off. They club me; they beat me all over; they tear my clothes! — nigger policemen, little master!" Passion exhausted her breath at every item; her voice came hoarse and gusty out of her exposed, bony chest. "Clubbed by nigger policemen! Ah, God! They lock me up in the calaboose. Poor me!"

Her breath and recital ended in a wail of misery. The wail and the misery reached him, not here, but in that bright, gay, selfish world of Paris, where he had passed a happy youth, a useless manhood. "France? What was he, an American, a creole, doing in France when such things were passing in America?"

"It was not right to sell me! It was not right to sell the nurse of a child!"

"Sell?" he repeated. "Sell?"

"I begged on my knees, I begged and begged!"

"Sell," he thought, "my nurse, — the nurse of my mother, — sell her, and spend the money in France"! He felt a hot wave in his heart, as if it were blushing.

"What did God free me for, *hein?* To be beaten by niggers? To be run after by little nigger dogs? Why didn't He kill me?

"Philo! Odette! Tom!" They were her children. She began to curse them, horribly, frightfully.

"They stole my money! They drove me out! They put the police on me! They set the children to insult me! I curse them! I curse them!"

Her shawl had fallen from her shoulders. She pulled and tore in the darkness at her shrivelled bare breasts, as if to tear away the ungrateful lips they had once nourished. He picked up the wretched rag and folded it around her. It felt good to touch her ill-treated limbs, to soothe the violence away from her trembling head.

"Hush! Hush!" She might be overheard. He tried to conform his Parisian accent to her creole ears; he even recollected some fragmentary creolisms. "Hush! hush! Philo, Odette, Tom; forget them! It is Charlot you must remember,—your little Charlot; eh, Nourrice?"

The Goupilleaus were going downstairs now, —the husband and wife arm in arm. He should have been there for the young lady.

"Give me satisfaction! Give me justice, Monsieur Charles!"

He remembered now distinctly hearing her call his father so,—"Monsieur Charles." A faint, shadowy form came out of his memory; it never came more distinctly than that, but he knew it for his own mother, and as he thought of her, his eyes again sought the stairway; the blue myosotis wreath was just disappearing. His own mother was a creole girl too, like Marie Modeste Motte.

"A little cabin somewhere, and a few picayunes to keep me from starving until I die! You are rich! rich!" What an accusation here, at this time, in this city, from such a source. Rich! great God! at what expense!

"To-morrow, Nourrice! To-morrow, the cabin; now, the picayunes!"

His white gloves received the soil of the gutter-mud as he took her horny, wrinkled hands in his.

"And those mulattresses! those impudent mulattresses in their fine clothes! As if they had not been freed too!"

She was a mulattress herself, but she could not forbear the insult, the curiously galling insult invented by the pure blacks.

"To-morrow! To-morrow morning, Nourrice! See, it is almost here!" It was not far off — the dawn. The stars were beginning to look pale and weary as if the ball had lasted too long for them also. On the gallery, the darkness was becoming gray.

The old woman felt her way along by the balustrade to the back-stairs. After waiting so many years, it was not too much to wait a few hours more, — out on the *banquette* in front of his house. She would follow him home; she could not trust even him; when he went out in the morning it would be better to be there to remind him.

The repetition of quadrilles, waltzes, deux-temps continued, but the gayety was no longer in the parlors; from the supper-room the guests went to the dressing-room; the procession was turning to the street again.

As Tante Pauline had said, it was a kind of judgment-day for the poor creoles. It is not pleasant to be in debt, but it is a comfortable mitigation of it to have an ocean between one and one's creditor. They could not help feeling towards Madame Montyon as on the real judgment-day the poor sinners may feel towards the archangel who wakes them from the sweet security of death to receive long-delayed punishment. If she had not said a word, her presence would have proved too suggestive for their consciences; but the good lady belonged to a school which did not economize powder and shot when occasion required, nor did she breath; she carried out her plans only too well. At the end of her prepared speeches, finding that the respondent did not assume the rôle of either thinking or speaking attributed to him or to her, she was enabled to elaborate her own manner and argument *à indiscrétion*. The initiative of polite-

ness had been tried, the propitiation of a cordial welcome, the head held high to avoid her, or at least the eyes, so that only the marabout feathers came in the plane of vision, — the attitude that expresses an effort to keep on a level with elevated principles, the attitude generally of the poor in pocket. Some quietly avoided her; others fled before her, but nothing diverted her. She lent not only one hand but two hands to her affairs. Her conversation rolled on uninterruptedly, exhaling rent-bills, due-bills, promissory notes, mortgages, and every other variety of debt which had been used to procure money from her or old Arvil. Her voice took the suavity out of the truffles, the bouquet from the champagne. The creole gentlemen (and who says creole says gastronome) had never eaten their patés, woodcock, and galantine with such obtuse palates. Law, conscience, honor! She arrayed herself and her obligations under the protection of each and all. "Extravagant as creoles, no wonder they cannot pay their debts! In Paris, millionnaires and *richissimes* alone give such suppers," she screamed, holding her black-velvet train high up, out of the way of

the waiters. "And Goupilleau says the community is bankrupt."

"My dear lady, we must make an effort for our young people; we must marry our daughters."

Marriage was the last necessity for her to recognize.

"But on what basis, — on what basis, in the name of Heaven, do you intend to found your families?"

"On love, pure and simple; it is the best we have, having no money."

"Love! Love! And what of honesty, eh? Can you buy bread for love in New Orleans? meat? rent houses? pay debts with love?"

"Would to Heaven we could, Madame!"

"Ah, Monsieur Frank," she said, — she had taken a fancy to the young German, and kept him near her, — "it is a community of Philippe Derons! Apropos, you will not forget to come to Goupilleau's office to-morrow at ten? We will show Mr. Philippe Deron whom he has to deal with. You see that old lady over there, — the one with the black lace cap, — well, to this day she owes me for a servant, a valuable

nurse. And she can come to balls, to introduce a grand-daughter into society, I believe. I reminded her of it this evening. And Goupilleau says that the law does not compel the payment of such debts; the law! yes, the law! but honor, the famous old creole honor! For gentlemen and ladies, all debts are debts of honor!"

It was unfortunately said in the hearing of one who, though the least solvent pecuniarily, was good for any amount payable by the code, — Monsieur Henri Maziel.

"That, that is a little strong," he muttered, — "*ça, c'est un peu fort.*"

He sought out some undertakers of duelling pomps and ceremonies, who promptly requested Monsieur Charles Montyon, then descending the staircase, to furnish at his earliest convenience reparation to creole honor impugned by his step-mother. The waiters carried it to the back-yard, the guests whispered it in the dressing-room; Madame Montyon herself was the only one to ignore it.

The last carriages rolled away in the breaking of a new day. The 28th of December succeeded to the inheritance of consequence

left by the 27th. Old Madame Fleurissant slept, under the weight of her ninety, ninety-two, or ninety-five years, the hermetically sealed sleep of the aged, with no crack or crevice for gnawing thought to intrude and torture the brain; while her guests carried to their homes and into their future lives the germs of variations in both which she through her *soirée* had sown.

Morris Frank, never more secure in the possession of his magnificent plantation, went over his nightly résumé of the details composing it, — the acres under cultivation, the uncleared forest, the sweep of the river-front, the sugar-house, the hands, even to the names of the mules; his settlement with his merchant that day: his bank-book heavy with amounts of deposit. His elation for the first time was untempered by regret for his father, whose toilsome life and recent death had made him heir to it all. In his superb physical strength and accumulated fortune he had but to put his hands out to grasp the pleasures of life, — his great, strong hands made to grasp, and his great, strong heart made to enjoy. The mag-

nificent, complimentary Madame Montyon had also her share in his self-satisfaction. Through his dreams ran the appointment to meet her the next day in the notary's office, and he sought in his mind all possibly useful information with which to confuse the plausible Philippe Deron.

Madame Montyon, whose fatigues blurred the enjoyable retrospect of her evening's business, felt only a sleepy triumph. The imported white maid missed her usual scolding, as she removed the *panache* of feathers and velvet train, — with professional tenderness and solicitude for them, professional indifference to their wearer.

To Madame Odile Maziel, instead of slumber came a vigil filled with the recollection of an evening of mortification and *ennui*, dominated by the prophecies she had defied at her marriage, which came now to brood over her future like sluggish crows.

Young Montyon, in his feelings an old Montyon, looked through a veil of cigar-smoke at the old raving Nourrice and the adjacent childish remembrances her presence evoked; at his native city, and the people whom his step-mother and father had abandoned in time of crisis; at the

irrepressible step-mother herself, at the imminent choice of swords or pistols her indiscretion had brought upon him, and the probable eventualities of the morrow; but last, and longest, he looked at a crown of blue myosotis over eyes that seemed the eyes of a thousand women in one, and at a face made from the core of his own heart, and at the history of it which he had overheard from his station near the parlor door.

And Marie Modeste; the music, the inexorable music, carried her around and around, on and on, until, horribly awake, yet expiring with fatigue, the early church-bells dissolved the infernal charm. She sank like a feather into a sleep of eider-down, where dreams came to tease her with sudden fallings, or with hints and suggestions touched her sensibilities to the coloring of a blush, the starting of a tear; her feet twitching and moving still in the waltz, — the one waltz with the young Parisian.

Even a *soirée*, however unusual the occurrence, could not disturb the equilibrium of Monsieur Goupilleau's notarial existence. He descended at his habitual hour the next morn-

ing to his office, situated on the ground-floor of his dwelling, and resumed the interrupted business of yesterday; leaving stoically on the threshold all thoughts of the seducing comforts and luxuries so recently installed in his chambers upstairs.

He was soon immersed in the "Succession d'Arvil," extracting the papers from a tin box, smoothing, cataloguing, annotating them, and arranging them in distinct little piles on his long office-table.

The private door of his office was pushed open by Marcélite.

"Monsieur!" she said, "Monsieur!" her voice boding ill news.

The whole upper stories of his house, with their treasures of domestic love and happiness, tottered under the notary's sudden fear.

"Speak quick!"

"Monsieur," — she gave vent to a long-repressed excitement, her words coming rapidly, incoherently, — "that, that was Morris Frank last night!"

"Ah!" Monsieur Goupilleau gave a sigh of relief.

"Morris Frank! But who is Morris Frank? Do you know who Morris Frank is?" she asked, raising her voice.

"Morris Frank?" repeated Monsieur Goupilleau, wonderingly.

She looked at him, still in the doubt which had confused her all night. Would it have been better to say nothing about it? Was it really better to tell? A year ago she would have kept it to herself; now —

"A little white-headed boy," she bent over and stretched her hand out, at the height of a young child, above the floor, "playing around the plantation quarters with the little negro children, — the son of the overseer, a German overseer, a man who hired himself out to whip slaves he was too poor to own!" Her scathing, fierce tongue brought the fire into her eyes.

"My God! The son of an overseer at the ball of the aristocrats! On my old plantation?" She read the confused inquiry in the notary's face. "The plantation of Monsieur Alphonse Motte, the father of my Mamzelle? He lives there still?" Monsieur Goupilleau's face brightened with a discovery. He commenced

a question: "The son of the overseer on Monsieur Motte's plantation?"

"That night! That night! It makes me crazy to think of it! The ringing of alarm-bells, the shooting of cannon, the gun-boats coming down the river, the negroes running away, setting fire, stealing; and the soldiers, soldiers everywhere, none of our white gentlemen about. My God! we were so frightened we could not think; we left everything in the house and ran. We got in a cart; it broke down; we walked miles. When we got to the town, what did we see? The young white boy the soldiers were hanging! No wonder she died, Mamzelle Marie!" She tried to steady her hand on the back of a chair, but it shook and trembled to the floor.

The front door of the office flew wide. Madame Montyon had jerked the knob out of the hand of the bowing clerk.

"*Hé!* Goupilleau, my friend!" she exclaimed brusquely; "on time, you see! To work; to work! What have we here, eh?"

She had divested herself of so much the night before, and invested herself in so little

this morning, that really her manner (which was always the same) alone remained to identify her.

She threw back the ends of her India shawl, which she had put over her purple cashmere morning *peignoir*, and tossed up her black lace veil, under which the gray hair stood out crinkled and crisp from the crimping and manipulation of the evening before.

"Just out of bed, you see! Only a cup of coffee!"

She seated herself at the table and began recklessly to open, examine, mingle, and scatter the papers arranged by the notary.

Monsieur Goupilleau had made a sign to Marcélite to place herself in a corner.

"Pardon me, Madame," he said to the lady, rescuing some of the documents, "but these papers are now in my possession. I am responsible for them."

"Pooh! pooh!" She was about to express further contempt of the admonition, when her words were cut short by the surprising appearance of her son. He was as much astounded as she at the meeting, and more confused.

"My son! Up at this hour!" She extended her cheek for his morning salute. "What in the world do you want here, with Goupilleau? But what is that — filth?" She got it from her father to select the strongest and coarsest word, but it was not entirely inapplicable to Nourrice, who had followed him in like a spaniel.

The poor old woman started at the voice; her ears were younger than her eyes. "Ah, mistress! You do not know me. He has better eyes than you; he knew me at once! Ah, Madame, it was not right to sell me, an old woman, a nurse! I begged you! I begged you on my knees!"

Madame Montyon, taken by surprise, wavered under the assault. "Nourrice! Elvire!"

"I was old, I was past the age, I was diseased!"

"Will you be silent?" She shook her hand before the face of the negro. What revelations, the terror of her motherhood, might not be impending?

"To sell a nurse! God never intended that!"

The young man stood in close conversation with the notary.

"Eh? What is that, — what is that?" Madame Montyon unceremoniously thrust herself in between them.

"Only a little cabin somewhere, little master, to keep me out of the gutters!" Nourrice, afraid still of her old mistress, raised her voice in anxiety.

"What is this nonsense? what is this craziness?" Madame screamed to her son. To the old woman: "Will you cease that whining? A little cabin? A little policeman!"

"My baby! My baby! It's your poor old Nourrice!"

"But, my son, what have you got in your head? I never received one cent for her, — not one cent! Those dishonest Montamats! They were only too glad of the emancipation!"

The gentlemen had continued their conversation without attention to her. She overheard some of their words.

"Money! money!" — the clerks in the next room must have heard her excited voice, — "to a wretch like that! Never! never! I forbid it!" She snatched from the notary the paper he had prepared.

"Do you understand, Charles? I forbid it! I command you to desist!" She launched full speed into one of her ungovernable tempers. "A check, *tudieu!* a check! without my advice! without my consent! One must have a private fortune, *tudieu!* to pension, to squander, to throw away, — a private fortune! My money, *tudieu!* my money!"

To her son's face arose an expression that only an intolerable insult could provoke; and the temper that seized him, — she knew only too well what that was, if she had not been too blind to see it. He closed his lips and turned away.

"Enough! Come, Nourrice!" The old woman followed him again; her back — the strong back he had once ridden for a horse — bent over nearly double; this time not in play, but in decrepitude.

He paused at the door and pointed to Nourrice. He had also thought of a supreme retort, an irreparable one: "She was my nurse, given me by my own mother. *You* sold her!"

The door had not closed on their exit before it was opened again.

"Mr. Morris Frank, to see Monsieur Goupilleau by appointment," announced the clerk.

The young German, fresh, fair, and rosy, had to struggle almost as hard to enter an office as a parlor. "Monsieur," said he, bowing to Monsieur Goupilleau; then, remembering the lady, "Madame," to Madame Montyon; then he paused, not knowing whether to offer his hand or not, until the opportunity passed, and he had to compose something appropriate to say.

The notary came to the rescue: "Ah, Mr. Frank! You are a little early, we are not quite prepared — in fact — "

"But, Goupilleau! what do you mean? You are going to let Monseiur Frank go without giving the information? He is a witness, don't you see, against Deron." Madame Montyon got this also from her father, — her versatility in passing from one passion to another.

"As you please, Madame; interrogate Mr. Frank yourself!"

Monsieur Goupilleau was plainly preoccupied about some other matter now, but she did not see it. She put her young friend through a cross-examination to prove her point of view of

the creole character as presented by the distant Deron.

"There, you see, Goupilleau, I am right! Monsieur Frank proves everything. All you have to do now is to *make* Deron pay."

"One moment, Mr. Frank," said Monsieur Goupilleau, as the young man was preparing to leave, "have you any objections to telling me if your plantation, the Ste. Marie plantation in the Parish of St. James, was once the property of Monsieur Alphonse Motte?"

The old lady's eyes brightened. She saw a new claim, a new debt. She looked greedily at the spread papers, and suspiciously at her young friend, ready to detect and expose any subterfuge.

"Motte? Motte? Is there something there, Goupilleau? Something new? Motte? But who are they? Motte! Motte!" She kept repeating the name to start her ear into recognition. "One of our high-minded, borrow-in-haste-and-repay-at-leisure creoles?"

Marcélite came from the corner where she had been waiting.

"Pardon, Madame, pardon," she said, in

eager defence. "Those words should not be used to designate the deceased Monsieur Alphonse Motte."

"Eh! eh!" Madame Montyon responded sharply to the assault. "What is this? Whom have we here? One of the family?"

The quadroon's eyes burned at the insult. The blood rushed to her head, deepening the color of her dark skin, reddening her lips, swelling her throat, inflating her nostrils, maddening her beyond all discretion. She raised her voice in the impudent way quadroons know so well, and looked at the white lady with an expression which, brave as she was, once she would not have dared.

"Madame is, perhaps, not satisfied; the insults of last night were, perhaps, not enough; Madame apparently does not mind duels; she would have one every day. Madame, perhaps, loves blood, or perhaps Madame thinks Monsieur Henri Maziel cannot fight, or perhaps she thinks her son has more lives than one; or —"

Even Morris Frank was prompt in the emergency. He caught Marcélite by the arm.

"Silence!"

"Marcélite!" the notary raised his voice in anger.

"Speak! I command you, wretch! Goupilleau, make her talk, I say! A duel! My son!"

Physical and verbal violence struggled for the mastery. Her face changed rapidly from crimson to white, then to crimson again; her lips trembled and became blue. She fell into her chair. Was it apoplexy, or a swoon? She responded to the quick touch of the notary.

"Goupilleau! Goupilleau!" her voice was all anguish, all submission, now. "She says — she says," pointing in the direction of Marcélite — "My son! — a duel!" She tried to rise, to pull herself up by the help of the table.

"Wait!" said Monsieur Goupilleau, forcing her back into her chair. "Do not stir! Not a word until I return!"

The little man had a manner which in emergencies could rise above occasions and impose commands on the most exalted.

In the very next room, sitting at one of his desks, plodding over some notarial copying,

Monsieur Goupilleau possessed the very Supreme Court of the Duel, the very infallibility of the code of honor, — a tall, thin, sallow young man, behind whose fierce black moustaches were no front teeth whatever.

"Ah," thought the notary, after the first glance, "Théodule is silent; Théodule is mysterious; Théodule has on his black coat and white cravat, — a duel, sure!"

The old lady had laid her head on the table. Her vigor had snapped. "My money! my money!" and the retort, "My own mother," — that was all she could hear from the buzzing in her ears. What she saw? All she could see; what, as a soldier's daughter, she should have better borne. When she raised her face, on the notary's return, her eyes — her little, strong, bold, brigadier eyes — were weeping.

"Madame!" It was the sympathy in Monsieur Goupilleau's voice that prepared her for the worst. "Madame, words spoken last night, no doubt in an unguarded moment, insults passed, taxing with dishonor honorable personages, — under the circumstances, Madame, nothing is to be done." He shrugged his shoul-

ders hopelessly, just as Théodule had done. "Gentlemen, even if they have no money, I might say particularly if they have no money, pay their debts of honor.'

"Words spoken last night! but I only said the truth!" She began to reiterate them angrily, then changed to an attack on the notary. "Nothing to be done, *tudieu!* Nothing to be done! You dare tell me that, Goupilleau, — me, a mother!" She had strength enough to rise now, and shake her head at him until her bonnet dropped to the floor. "You dare tell any mother that, when her son is going to fight a duel?"

The "Succession d'Arvil" lay scattered everywhere, — documents folded, unfolded, face up, face down. She seized one and grasped a pen. Her fingers had not recovered, nor could her eyes see clearly; but despite wavering, blots, and irregularities, the words yet stood out with sufficient clearness: —

I apologize to Monsieur —— for offensive words spoken at Madame Fleurissant's ball last night. I beg him to believe that a moneyed debt is not a debt of honor. LOUISE DUPERRE MONTYON.

"*Tudieu!* nothing to be done! Goupilleau, you are a fool! You will see that something is to be done. Here, supply the name and send it to that—" and she called Monsieur Henri Maziel, in French, the name of a man who prepares ambushes for assassination. "What's that?" She jerked her head aside from a touch. It was Marcélite gently replacing her bonnet, and examining her face and head with professional interest.

"Blessed Virgin!" she thought; "what a genius her hairdresser must be!"

"Here, my good woman," said the old lady, when the bonnet was fastened and the lace veil dropped, "give me your arm; conduct me home immediately."

The notary read first one side of the paper, then the other, scratched over with the hard terms of some of old Arvil's extortions.

"Ah!" said he, looking around his office, deserted now of all except the young German, who was still trying to think of something to say, something to do.

Bred in a classical school, Monsieur Goupilleau was addicted to phrases that came epi-

grammatically. Shrugging his shoulders, his eyes beamed with the intelligence that only legal experience can give, and with the satirical intelligence which only such experience with women inspires: "*Ah, grattez la femme, et vous trouverez la mère!*"

MARRIAGE OF MARIE MODESTE.

MARRIAGE OF MARIE MODESTE.

"MARCÉLITE! but where is Marcélite? Send Marcélite to the parlor," called Madame Goupilleau to a passing servant. "Continue, Sister, continue; I am listening."

And the low voice of the Sister of Charity poured forth such a tale of asylum necessities mingled with asylum gossip, that Madame Goupilleau was carried away again into forgetfulness of both Marcélite and the parlor.

"Is it possible! I can hardly believe it!"

The Sister had asked but for one moment in the corridor, but she had underestimated the length, and Madame Goupilleau the interest of her budget. It sounded almost like a scandal in the church, a deplorable thing of infinite interest to all good Christians. Not until the volubly

grateful itinerant disappeared with replenishment of her asylum's particular lack and exhaustion of its particular grievance, did duty recall with painful jerk the chaperon to her charge.

"Ah! simpleton that I am! and I have vowed and vowed never to see those tiresome Sisters again."

She ran along the corridor to save what time she could, her long skirts rustling after her, holding her head with both hands and scolding it well. Without stopping she entered the parlor. Too late! At the first glance she saw that.

"Tante Eugénie!" exclaimed Marie Modeste with quavering breath, as if waking from a dream.

"Madame!" apostrophized Charles Montyon, hurrying forward to meet her.

"Not a word! I know it all! It is my fault!" but she looked at them both reproachfully.

She had planned it otherwise, and far better, — this scene, — with a minute particularity for detail which only an outsider and a schemer in futurity can command. The young man would come to her first, of course, with his avowal, as eti-

quette prescribes. She would go to Marie herself, and delicately, as only a woman can, she would draw aside the veil from the unconscious heart and show the young girl the dormant figure of her love there, — love whose existence she did not dream of.

"My daughter," she would say. Ah! she had rehearsed the discourse too often to have halted for a word. At any moment of the night or day her tongue could have delivered it. "My daughter!" All that as a daughter she had once craved to hear and been disappointed of, and all that her exempt mother heart yearned to utter, she would tell. For she had a mother's heart, if by an error of Nature she had never been a mother.

But the event always fools the prepared. Now, she knew not what to say or do. She was in fact embarrassed. It would have been better to depend upon the inspiration of the moment. She sank into an arm-chair and fanned herself with a handkerchief which scented the air with violet perfume.

"I beg a thousand pardons. I did not intend; I had no idea — " protested the young man.

That was so; when she was called away they were conversing about the climate of Paris.

"Tante Eugénie!" was all that Marie could murmur; for the dream held her still, — a dream out of which she could not awake. Her eyes shone, touched with a new, bright light, and her white face swam behind blushes, appearing and disappearing like the moon behind thin clouds.

"She looks adorable, the little one," thought Madame. "If I could only have got hold of Marcélite, I would have sent her to chaperon them."

It was not pleasant to think that the vigilance which had guaranteed a whole institute of girls should damage its record in these simple circumstances. A pest on Sisters and asylums! "*Eh, Mignonne!*" She drew the girl to her to look into those wonderfully brilliant eyes. It was impossible; the lids closed so quickly, and the long black lashes fell so thick on the cheeks, curling up at the ends as if singeing from the hot blushes, that even burned Madame's lips pressed against them. The troublesome face finally hid itself among the laces on her shoulder.

"Thou art sure? Very sure? No mistake? *là! là!*" kissing her again. "After all, it is what I expected. And you, Monsieur," to Charles, who was standing close on the other side of her chair, "you have been indiscreet, as indiscreet as possible. You should have come to me first. You know that. Oh, no! I cannot pardon you, at least not immediately. Have you spoken to Monsieur Goupilleau?"

"Madame, I intended —"

"What! Not even spoken to my husband? But go downstairs this moment, this instant! He is in his office."

"I assure you it was unpremeditated — leaving us alone —"

"Ah! that is what I have always said; those Sisters do no good, going around from house to house —"

She was fixed and inexorable; would not listen to him, would not even look at him, resting her head against the tall back of her chair, directing her eyes into vacancy.

Behind her, discretion was again violated and outraged. The hands of Marie and Charles met of themselves, first accidentally and then

purposely, and would not part. The eyes which had so much to conceal from Madame had for him abundant revelations, which the lashes did not hide, from eyes that caused her lids to rise merely by glances. Her face came out of the blushes, — a thin, white face in an oval frame of plaited black hair, the lips parted as if again in the tremor of caress; — Madame Goupilleau, with that big back to her chair, might just as well have been in the corridor again with the Sister.

"Tante Eugénie, I shall go with him. I, I —" She had to go, for the hands absolutely would not unclasp.

"My little girl is no more," thought Madame Goupilleau as they left her alone. "Well! *Ma bonne!*" to Marcélite, who came at last into the room. "Your young lady is going to make a fine marriage,— a fine marriage! *Tiens!*" interrupting herself suddenly. "I wanted you; where were you? I called you to go into the parlor to chaperon. Ah! — I see now. You were in connivance! What innocence I have, for my age!"

"Madame!" the quadroon's voice was apolo-

getic, but her eyes were triumphant. "Such a good opportunity —"

"At least, — at least, you did not send that stupid Sister to me?"

"That! No, Madame! On my word of honor."

"In truth, I believe you capable of anything. What a rigmarole! the Archbishop and some Madame Houbi, or Hibou, and a priest of heaven knows where! All the while *ce beau monsieur* was on his knees to Mademoiselle. It is old Madame Montyon, however, who will have something to say," concluded Madame Goupilleau in thought. "She will beat a tocsin about our ears."

Madame Montyon, as expected, from the very first word of announcement resolutely vetoed any proposition of marriage between her step-son, her prospective heir, and a dowerless bride. When the young man came to her, the old lady was sitting in her room in the twilight, going over her accounts, which for convenience and secrecy she carried in her head, — a pleasant, wakeful occupation, adding dollar to dollar; watching the pile of gold, the concrete

presentment of her numerous investments, grow in endless, ceaseless procreation. Her *boudoir* was as bare and simple as a soldier's quarters. There were no more effeminacies of culture or religion about it than about herself. She had asked no other assistance from Providence than a neutral position as to her affairs, which she managed as her father had his army, without intermediation of saints or intermeddling of priests. And no one could deny that her affairs had paid her the compliment of prospering under the *régime*.

"No, my son, no!" she reiterated, varying the formula not in the slightest degree. "Believe me, I know better than you. The young lady will not suit at all. In the first place, she has nothing."

"But, my mother —"

"In marriage there must be something; money is tangible, money remains; money is something, in fact —"

"Love?" he said, in a low voice, for it was novel to him, and he had yet to learn not to be shy of it.

"Love! Love! That for love!" snapping

her fingers, which she could do with masculine effect.

And love was his theme, his inspiration, his reason; and love was her only dower! But it was like talking of God to an unbeliever.

"Be reasonable; listen to me! On my word of honor, as a woman who was not born yesterday, and who has not lived with her eyes shut, this crisis is temporary, momentary. She is not the only young woman in the world! *enfin*, I guarantee," raising her voice and her finger impressively, — "I guarantee that you will meet at least, *at least*, one woman a year during the next ten years of your life whom you will love enough to make your wife. Ten women! Ten wives! *Mon Dieu!* and I am putting it low. No! I can never consent."

The rebellious retorts, the marplot of their domestic intercourse, which always rose in his heart at the sound of her voice, crowded to his tongue now, but he had no temper to utter them.

"Love, my dear, it passes like everything, — only a little quicker." He was standing. She did not raise her head to him. She was speaking not to him alone, but all men. "*Mon Dieu!*

This one will go like 'Good-morning'!" She kissed the tips of her fingers. "In point of fact, if you should marry Mademoiselle Motte now, and she should die, you would marry again in two years. Ah! don't jump so; don't exclaim at me that way. It is not my fault. I did not create men," — shrugging her shoulders. "After all, it is only Nature; and Nature is another name for a strong, ugly animal."

How could she feel so! How could she talk so! He looked at her sitting below him, and for the first time tried to divest her of age, ugliness, and cynicism. She had been young once like Marie Modeste. Had she ever lifted her eyes to a man as Marie did, praying, yet dreading, his love? Had her warm hands ever got cold and trembled in the hand of another, as Marie's did? Had her slim form for one instant been in the arm of another — could first love ever be forgotten? Or was there one human being in the world whom this great ocean had not once enfolded, engulfed, drawn down, drowned beyond recollection, beyond comprehension of past, present, future, self, interest, money?

"And you think, you think — And women," changing the question, "can they not love? This young girl, Marie, she loves me, she has told me so." He laid his hand on her shoulder to accentuate his whisper.

The old lady's husband had married her for money, and had widowed her contemptuously during his life. She answered truthfully.

"If she loves you, all I have to say is that she will not be more disappointed now if you do not marry her, than some day if you do." His hand fell from her shoulder; he turned away. So old! So gray-haired, — and the widow of his own father! He had not a word to say. His dreams and fantasies were frightened away. How the young are tied and hobbled! their most innocent plans twisted, turned, thwarted by the skeleton hand of a dead father, or mother, or grandparent, holding a careful entail of unhappiness and disgrace. And there is no relief from the heritage! Flash after flash, illumination came in his brain along the dark spots of his ignorances, — spots in his father's and mother's life which thought had glided over before, which his manhood had

respected; and the moment divulged connubial secrets, preserved so far by the miracle which preserves the simplicity of the young in a secretless, mystery-less world!

"I assure you, my son," his step-mother changed her voice briskly at the super-importance of her own business, "I am exceedingly pleased at the results of the Arvil succession. It is very good I came to attend to it myself. When we return to France —"

"Return to France?"

"I said, when we return to France. *Then* you will see the difference. You shall be installed *en prince*. Your separate establishment, your —" she checked off finger by finger her intentions for his pleasure and comfort. "*Then* you can talk of marriage, *then* you can select, *then* you will be a *parti*, and you can marry a *partie*."

"And Mademoiselle Motte?"

"Eh! Will you never be convinced?' frowning angrily. "Is Mademoiselle Motte a *partie?* Has she a *dot?* Has she even a family? The foundling of a negro woman!"

"No! No!" Her own voice could not have

been louder nor more authoritative. He came around and stood close in front of her chair. Without thinking, — for his heart gave him no time, — he spoke, soon changing his tone and his words, for his audience changed, — the old woman and the chair fading away, and the young girl appearing, standing before him as she did this morning, transforming his defence into a tribute. It was dark in the room, or his face would have betrayed the vision. In the early, powerful moments of first love the real presence is carried around everywhere, and the sacrament of communion is celebrated by the heart, in any place, at any moment.

"Listen! Let me tell you, once for all. A war had broken over her country. Her father was killed in the first engagement. Her mother died as soon as the news reached her, — shot in fact and in truth by the same bullet. But one life was spared, a weak, wretched, frail infant, as if by a curse, — a girl to live and grow and develop in a detached condition. Her nurse, one of the very slaves about whom the war was being fought, aided the flight of the panic-stricken wife from her home on the approach

of a noisy, victorious enemy, and received into her arms the child which was born an orphan. Orphanage, my mother, is what a child never outgrows; it is what God himself cannot remedy." His voice took intonations unknown before to him. "The nurse, a slave no longer, since she had flown with the infant to this city in the possession of the emancipationists, took the child to herself and nursed it, — nursed it as the Virgin Mary must have nursed *her* Heaven-sent babe; nursed it on her knees, in abnegation, in adoration; lodging it in her room, which became, not a room, but a sanctuary; couching it in her own bed, which became an altar; feeding it, tending it, as imagination can conceive a passionate heart in a black skin tending a white child under the ghostly supervision of dead parents. When the child grew to intelligence of its surroundings, when memory began, day by day, to weave together frail bits of history, then a fiction arose as if by incantation out of the rude, ignorant, determined mind of the nurse. She placed the child at a school, that the child's memory could not antedate. She gave the child a responsible white guardian,

which the child's knowledge could not contradict. She took her forever out of the homely surroundings which love had made sumptuous and self-sacrifice holy, but which would eventually prove social ostracism. To maintain this fiction, patience, money, time were needed. Patience? Did a woman ever need patience for a child? Was money ever lacking, from an inferior to a superior? Time, — the good God gives the same time to the slave as the free, the black as the white, the ignorant as the wise, the weak as the strong. Patience fed the fiction, anticipated doubts, allayed suspicions. Money came in quantities sufficient to form not a shield, but a pedestal; and time took the little girl and led her onward and onward through an education, and through the experience which brings the necessary ingredients to the formation of a woman's heart. Time protected the fiction to the last moment; but — the last moment came. The basis of the young girl's life was suddenly withdrawn, and truth came, in the fall to the earth. With the truth came, however, the substance of what fiction had supposed. To the nurse came two

willing associates. To the young girl, bereaved by the fiction almost as cruelly as she had been by the war, came parents, — volunteer parents. Ah! who could see her and refrain from loving her?" He stopped breathless.

"He raves," thought the old lady, "like De Musset! But she did not answer, — perhaps some hitherto unperceived merits in God's creation of men coming before her mental vision. She was only what experience had made her; her theories, like most women's theories, came from the heart, not the brain, and she had no imagination to beautify or make them palatable.

Love is a noxious grass for growth. One rootlet planted in the heart, and two beings are soon so tied, tangled, and knotted together by the miraculous reduplication of perhaps a single look, sigh, form of face, glance of the eye, that there is nothing for it but marriage, with the shortest possible engagement, to get the *trousseau* ready in; the creoles, wisely or not, prefering to apply the test of fidelity to husband rather than lover.

This was in winter. The spring approached, each day an incendiary to the heart, and all

hymeneal. No one grows reasonable with the spring. The old lady felt the occult influences against her, and resented them, — the birds aggressively lusty, the sky bringing the roses out until the bushes threatened premature exhaustion from wanton prodigality in blooming, the moon acting like a venal Voudou charm. In a community where none but dowerless brides are born, love easily discounts money; and money was her only capital. She was left more and more in a helpless minority, fighting hard to maintain the solidarity of her resolution and fortune; daily reaffirming the one and intrenching the other by testament and codicil behind a bulwark of papers proof against the assaults of present generations, and unborn ones to the third and fourth degree.

The contract of marriage, her consolation now, was to be her substitute when she was gone, an unanswerable rebuke, a certificate of consent but not approval, a notarial monument to the wealth and generosity of the step-mother, the foolishness of the groom, and to all perpetuity a confession of poverty by the bride. It is hard to be rich, and a mother at the same time;

but the old lady undertook the task. And while the young people were learning the necessary indispensable vocabulary of endearment for future intimacy, she applied herself to drawing with equal security the strings about her heart and the strings about her purse.

June brought the wedding day; for June brings more wedding days in New Orleans than any other month of the year. June by the calendar, and accredited for the forward month with hot suns and light showers, had peeped in upon every moon since December, confusing all meteorological rules, befooling the silly weeds as usual, and by unseasonable enticement into blossoming, losing the fruit-trees their crops.

In the forenoon hours, with their compliments and presents, came the bridesmaids, — all in one body, contagious with emotion; exclamatory, effusive, vibrating from the verge of tears to the verge of laughter.

"Ah, Marie!"

"Ah, *chère!*"

"At last!"

"Your wedding day!"

"You are well, *chérie?*"

"You are not frightened?"

"You do not tremble the least, — the least in the world?"

"Let me feel your heart!"

"It would paralyze me!"

"Such a beautiful day!"

"A little warm!"

An unconfessed but patent awe of her held them aloof. They stood together in a group, from which their sentences issued spasmodically in bunches. They had been schoolmates from their *a*, *b*, *c* class, — most of them; so had the mothers and grandmothers of some of them. Since short dresses and socks, mindful of their destiny, they had promised to be bridesmaids one to another. Or, death supervening, *porteuses:* to walk in white toilettes and white veils at the head of the burial procession, as this evening they intended to do at the bridal. An office so conspicuously desirable, this last, that it was made the subject of barter and bond; a matter of written and sealed documents, hidden in secret corners of their desks, — the most precious archives of their school life, though fluctuating annals of its friendships.

Bride or corpse, how remote Marie Modeste was already on that road which they could travel as yet only in imagination. She was changing already. Taking the cue from their relative positions, they spoke disparagingly of themselves, meanly of their offerings, in despondent voices: —

"Nothing but a souvenir from your old Fifine."

"You won't forget the dunce of your class when you look at this, *chère?*"

"This has no value, Marie, but sentiment."

"Promise not to open this until I leave; it's a horror."

"You won't mind wearing this for my sake, Marie, you are so amiable."

"*Chérie*, hang this somewhere out of sight, but keep your faithful Louise in mind."

"I made this myself, for you; that's the reason it's so ugly."

"A little *porte-bonheur* for your new life."

"A little *vide-poche* for your toilette."

"A cushion for your *prie-Dieu;* I implore you do not look at the stitches!"

"You will not forget us, Marie?"

"You will always be the same to us, Marie?"

"We did n't learn our *a*, *b*, *c* together for nothing, did we, Marie?"

"And we did n't miss our cosmography together for nothing, did we, Marie?"

"Do you remember, Marie, when —"

"Or that day —"

They were actually beginning to have a past to talk about, like their mamans!

"*Mon Dieu!* how long ago that is; it seems like another life."

"Just about a year!"

"And Marie the first one married!"

"But you are engaged, Fifine!" they all cried. Fifine as usual persisted in a denial, absurd in the face of evidence.

"Well, Marie, I give it to you with all my heart." (Meaning the honor.) And they all kissed her again to affirm the sentiment unanimously. "Ah, you are very fortunate!"

"And he is so handsome, *chère*."

"And *distingué*."

"And such good family."

"Oh, he has everything, — everything."

"Was it a Novena, Marie?"

"Or our Lady of Lourdes?"

"Saint Roch?"

"Saint Roch! bah! He is old."

"*Ma chère*, they tell me there is a place down town, way down town, where you can obtain anything, — absolutely anything."

"If it had not been for that pretty toilette at Madame Fleurissant's ball!"

"That was the first time you saw him, *hein*, Marie!"

"*Mon Dieu!*" in chorus at her assent.

"I told maman my dress was hideous there."

"Three months ago! You kept your secret well, Marie."

"As for me, I would announce the first week."

"Like old Maman Birotteau; one hour afterwards, — one hour, that's positive, — she was in the street announcing Adelaïde's engagement."

"To cut off retreat from the gentleman."

"Poor Auguste!"

"I will never get married, I 'm sure."

"Nor I either; I never had any luck."

"If I do not get married, I do not want to live."

"Nor I, *chérie*, candidly."

"Not to get married, is to confess one's self simply a — a *Gorgon*."

"But it's a woman's vocation! What must she do else?"

"There is always the convent."

"The convent! bah! The convent does n't fool any one."

"*Non, merci!* No convent for me!"

"I would rather comb Saint Catharine."

"Like Tante Pauline?"

"And tangle the whole town with your tongue?"

"My maman was married at sixteen."

"And my grandmaman at fourteen."

"Ah, but times were different then!"

"Women had more chance."

"And men less egotism."

"Frankly, I find men insipid."

This was too obvious an insincerity to be taken seriously; even the bride laughed.

"But we must not stay all day!"

"Yes, *chérie*, we must leave you."

"*Adieu!*"

"*Au revoir!*"

"*Courage!*"

"We will pray for you!"

They closed the door and went down the stairs to the corridor.

"But, you know, she is a brunette, and he is a *brun*."

"He should have been blond."

"Brown and brown, that is bad."

"Every one ought to marry her opposite."

"I adore blondes; they look so cold."

"No, according to me; dark eyes and light hair."

"Blue eyes and black hair,—that is my type."

"And tall, tall, tall."

"Oh, I hope the good God will send me a *fiancé!*"

"*Dis-donc*, Loulou, you are not engaged,—true? true?"

"No, unfortunately! No such good luck."

"No matter; the whole town says so."

"*Ouf!* how dark the parlors look!"

"They sign the contract of marriage at three o'clock."

"I hear the old Madame Montyon gives handsomely."

"On the contrary, I heard, not a cent."

"But what will Charles do for a living?"

"Work, like other men."

"A Parisian work?" Loulou mimicked his Parisian accent.

"He is not a Parisian, he only affects it; he is a Creole like all of us."

"And she has nothing."

"Not a cent. If old Monsieur Motte had lived, it would have been different." Referring to their school traditions of his wealth.

Vestiges of winter were still lurking in the damp, stone-paved corridor, chilling them a little before they got into the bright street, where a summer sun shone all the year round. The chill remained slightly in their hearts as they walked away, for beauty and youth were the only dower of most of them, and both were fragile; one year already had passed over their maturity, and patience is not a Creole virtue. Their aspirations being neither high nor many, disappointment need only come in one form, to be effectual.

The young girl who was so soon to be a bride sat alone in her room, in the isolation of retreat

which custom recognizes as salutary if not needful, — alone, yet not entirely alone, for she had the spiritual companionship which comes in the solemn moments of life to the pure in heart, and permits them while on earth to feel if not to see God. A week ago she had passed her eighteenth birthday. Only eighteen anniversaries since her birth! It was little to form a separation from then and now. Looking back, she saw them rising, her birthdays, an ascending plane of mental and physical growth, until they culminated three months ago. That date had changed her: she was a woman now. Over her face had fallen the dignity which over faces of her type falls without crepuscular interlude, severing them from childhood as from a day that is past. Her dreaming eyes, wakened to look on life itself, not illusions fed by the imagination, were beginning to fill with women's wares, all on top and exposed, as good women's wares are, for the world to see. The inchoate sentiments that had held the mouth in vacillation were gone; the lips that had said "I love," had found their character and expression. But the body was still in arrears, still hesitating

over the sure profit of a change, receiving yet from the long, thin, white gown the curves and mouldings it should have contributed.

She walked across the room to where the usual pictures of devotion hung on the walls. They had answered their purpose in her life, and were beginning to be useless. Her religion was no longer to be fed by symbols, but to produce them. But as she looked at them, holding in her hand the little worn prayer-book that had once belonged to her mother, they helped her to span the interval that separated her from her dead parents, — those absent guests represented only by proxies at all the feasts of her life. Her mother had once stood this way in bridal dress, waiting for him who was to become her husband and Marie's father. The virgins and sainted women from across the centuries made the thought plain to her, of the immensity of eternity and woman's vocation in it. Her heart throbbed and expanded under her novitiate's dress; she soared higher and higher in spirit; she touched immortality in vision. She felt the protecting hand of God, — God, the Father, who had carried her, an

infant, through bloodshed, revolution, and disaster; had given her a nurse — mother, friends; had brought a heart for her heart from a distance, from the unknown, across an ocean! He had deprived her in youth, and saved the hoardings for a dower of love on her wedding day! She hid her face in her hands, to tell Him her love and gratitude.

Young girls who come into a world already prepared for them, from their layette to their trousseau, on their marriage day sit and think about the wedding banquet preparing for them, the costly presents, the beautiful dress, the new-fashioned wreath, — not of orange-flowers, but of blossoms more appropriate to the virginity of the rich, — what they will do after marriage, and what after that, sending their thoughts along blushing paths maybe too surely blazed by secret gossip or contraband literature. They do not feel their destiny like the young girls who are led along by God Himself, — patiently waiting in seclusion, poverty, and affliction the appointed seasons for knowledge, hearing in silences and darknesses divine notifications, receiving understanding with the intimations

futurity; the young girls whom He reserves for the good of the human race, to mother a Saviour, or transform the seed of a ploughman into the soul of a hero.

Marcélite entered the room and stood silently waiting, looking, thinking how best to carry out her intentions. "Mamzelle Marie!" She did not speak as the authoritative nurse to her charge; she was the humble servant of a future madame.

"Oh, Marcélite! the thoughts,—the thoughts one has!" It was so good to lay her head once more on the shoulder that had cradled her, a baby! so good to feel that soft, dark hand caressing her as it had caressed her all through life! For a moment she had felt strange and lonely in this glimpse of the new, foreign future. "Marcélite, do you know what it is to love? When I think of it, you know, *ma bonne*, I am glad that my—that Monsieur Motte did not live." How happy she must have been to pronounce that name again! "I wanted to die at first, I wanted it to kill me; but it is all gone,—that feeling," laying her hand on her heart and making gratuitous confession. "Think; if he had

lived, it might all have been different. I might not have met Charles; and all this love I give him, and all the love he gives me, — what is the love of an uncle in comparison? God was right to manage it that way, — to send you to manage it for Him. And, Marcélite, all the time I was studying, I thought it was for my uncle; but I see now it was for Charles. Everything I did was for him. I believe I was born just to marry him. I am frightened now, when I think I might have died without it. It is grand to be a woman. Oh, I feel like a woman now; I know what it is to be a woman. God has told me everything." The low voice hardly carried the words to the nurse's ear, but her breath fell like the sweetest caresses on the dark skin.

"*Bébé! Bébé!*" was all the woman could say. Her own marriage in the far-off days of slavery, — what a thing it had been, not to be mentioned, not to be thought of, before her white child bride!

"Marcélite, do you think he loves me as much as I love him?" A question of supreme importance, requiring a long, rambling, but never-ending answer.

"Because, Marcélite, what do you do in life when the one you love does not love you?"

Although no one in the city, — a city of intrigue, — knew better than the hairdresser, she had nothing to say.

"Marcélite, did my maman look like me as a bride? And my papa, was he like Charles?"

"*Bébé, Zozo!*" Could human beings ever unite the beauties and excellences she described, or eloquence stray farther beyond the boundaries of truth?

"Their pictures hang on the walls of the house, there on the plantation; their books, their furniture —"

Pictures of what had been a pictureless ideal to her! Her orphan presentment of parents was no better than the blind one's presentment of sight.

"One of these days, Marcélite, you and I, we will slip away from home — oh, Charles shall not prevent me!" she blushed and smiled; she had never smiled that way before she met him. "We will travel to that plantation; we will walk through the fields, slowly, easily; we

will come to the gardens; we will go through them slowly, easily; you will be my guide; we will creep to the house, slowly, easily; we will peep through the shutters, and quick! quick! you will point out the place where those pictures are. Heaven! if I do not die in that moment, I will tear open the doors, I will rush in! If there should be dogs about! I hope there will be no dogs—"

She stopped suddenly. As if it were true,—all this! As if the nurse would not destroy a world to please her, or fabricate one to delude her into security! She knew the woman, and the extravagances of her heart. Almost, almost she felt as if she could give up her bridegroom that it might be true, Marcélite's story,—her bridegroom, and all the love that dazzled around her future like an aureole. She forced herself away from the thought.

"But what a toilette! What elegance! I never saw you so fine in my life before! No, stand still! Let me look at you!" She walked round and round the nurse. In truth, calico skirts could not stand out more stiffly, nor a bandanna be tied into more bows and knots.

Simply to look at the new silk apron made it rustle.

"What is that you have in your hand? For me?"

"*Bébé*, you will hide it in your drawer. You will not look at it, — not yet. To-morrow, next day."

"*Par exemple*, I am not to look at anything to-day, it seems! Well, you for one, — you reckon without my curiosity."

She laughed as she snatched a package out of the nurse's hands. She had never laughed so easily, so merrily in her life. It was like the laugh of her old school companions, and sounded novel and charming in her own ears.

"Fifine, Loulou, Tetelle, all said the same thing. It is too absurd!"

"*Zozo!* To-morrow or next day."

"Bah! I am going to do as I please. I am going to open this. I am going to open them all, right now. You need not think I do not know what it is! It is my present, — my wedding present from you. And I have been expecting it all day, and I knew you were going to keep it till the last minute! *Là!* Madame Marcélite

always takes her time! Madame Marcélite must always produce her effect! Ah, I know you, you ogre!" And she stopped again to pass her hands affectionately over the nurse's shoulders, which stood out like feather pillows.

"Now we will see what it is. A box, a work-box, a beautiful *nécessaire*. Thimble, see! it fits. Needles, scissors, thread, — evidently I am to do my own sewing in future. No more Marcélite to darn, no more Marcélite to mend. And another compartment underneath! A—h!"

The little compartment underneath was filled with gold dollars. At first one would have thought it jewelry. The nurse started more violently at the discovery than the young lady.

"It is what I have saved for you, *Bébé!* — for your wedding day, — ever since you were born, ever since your maman gave you to me."

Looking at the face before her, Marcélite tested another argument.

For a year she had not ventured to offer her earnings. She had uncomplainingly borne that the Goupilleaus should supplant her, the sole provider heretofore, but now —

"It was your own time, *Bébé;* I belonged to you: you have a right to it. Who made me your slave? God. Who made me free, *hein?*"

The girl looked stolidly, mechanically, at the box in her hand.

It seemed impossible for the quadroon's voice to become more humble, more pleading; but the words that followed proved that it could.

"*Zozo!* You don't mind taking it from me, from your Marcélite, your nurse, your own negro. No one will ever know it! I swear before God, no one will ever know it! *Bébé*, you must have a little money, just for yourself, — when you get married you don't know. You see, *Bébé*, they are strangers, they are not us, they are not Marcélite, they are not you. I could have bought you something; but I wanted you to have some money, some picayunes of your own."

It was hard to understand that the softness of her breath, the strength of her arms, the activity of her feet, the chained freedom of her whole life, could be accepted without dishonor, and not the money value in coin; hard for the

girl to understand it, too. Her past life of unconscious dependence rose before her, humiliating, degrading her. Tears of mortification came into her eyes; the bright, beautiful day was tarnished.

"Only for the first few days, *Bébé;* after that, you won't mind taking their money. Oh, it will all be different after you are married, when you are his wife. What use have I got for it? I've got no parents; I've got no children, only you! They must n't say you came to them without a picayune; with only your clothes in a bundle, like a poor unknown! Whom must I give it to, if not to you? To negroes? You think I am going to work for negroes, eh!"

There was something else in marriage than love? There were distinctions. She had no money; that made a difference! She was to take this, acquiesce in what conscience, tradition forbade, receive money from a negro woman rather than her husband. For the first few days — they, the Montyons, were rich; she was poor.

Gauging effect on the face of Marie, Marcélite saw that she was misunderstood, felt that

she had blundered. She had come to the end of her argument with her cause lost.

"You won't take it! You are going to refuse it! You despise it! You would rather go to the Montyons for money than take it from me! I know, I know, it's because I am black, it's because I am a negro!" She closed her eyes over the tears, and her mouth over the sobs that shook inside her huge frame. It had escaped her,— the first confession of the galling drop in her heart. Gay, *insouciante*, impudent, she had worn her color like a travesty. Who would have suspected her?

"Marcélite! Marcélite! You must not talk that way! See, I take it, I take it thankfully! Have I not taken everything from you? You do me injustice. How can you reproach me?"

But it came too late to appease. The woman shook her head, flinging the tears savagely from her eyes.

"No! No! Throw it away! Pitch it out of the window! They have money, — the Montyons have plenty of money. Everything I do goes wrong; no one helps me. Even God will not help a negro!"

There was a rustling of skirts in the hall outside, a tap at the door.

"Tante Eugénie!" exclaimed the girl, joyfully. "I shall show it to her! She will see it! She will thank you too!" She bounded forward with the open box.

"Let her know you take money from me! *Non! Non!*" The situation was reversed. With an adroit movement of the hand the quadroon possessed herself of the box and hid it from Madame Goupilleau, effacing magically all trace of emotion except in her eyes, in whose depths feeling seemed to surge and roll like the billows of the sea after the storm has passed.

"It is time, *mignonne!* Come! They are going to sign the contract now. Oh, you will understand all about it when you hear it! It is long, and, *ma foi!* perfectly incomprehensible. It is in my head in such confusion! Marcélite, my good woman, go downstairs to the office, and ask the young gentlemen who are to serve as witnesses to have the kindness to ascend to the parlor."

Monsieur Goupilleau, the notary, was closeted in his private office with Mr. Morris Frank.

They had been together the entire morning in an interview which was the *résumé* of a month's correspondence and a week's personal intercourse. The notary, glancing at his watch between sentences, saw that economy of words must be practised to conclude within the appointed time; his face was grave at the reflection of his miscalculation; perhaps a day or two more would have saved him the disappointment of his scheme and still rendered feasible his *coup de théâtre*, as he called it to himself.

The young German's face was grave also, graver than the notary's. It was a summary proceeding, — this thrusting not only a plantation in the balance, but, gently as the notary put it, a father's reputation also. If his father had only lived one year longer to answer and act in his own defence! In embarrassment of manner and words the young man had repeated over and over again: —

"Monsieur, I assure you, you do not know my father. He never made a mistake in his life."

The notary whose profession was officially to prevent the depredations of friends and

relations upon one another, replied less as a notary than as a Frenchman, —

"Monsieur, a father never makes mistakes to a son such as you are."

It was a cruel predicament. The notary held a letter in his hand; continually referring to it with his eyes, he continually forbore reading it aloud.

"To acknowledge what you wish, criminates my father."

"Restitution is all that could vindicate him."

"There must be some law, some — "

"She is a young girl, an orphan; you a man, strong — "

A desperate last hope, and the swiftly-passing time, impelled the notary to seek this adjunct to his legal argument.

"A donation?" The young man asked eagerly.

"No, sir," — Monsieur Goupilleau drew himself up haughtily, — "restitution."

Armed with decision, Monsieur Goupilleau began to read the letter in his hand, fixing his eyes resolutely on the paper and throwing his voice into the official tone of indifference

to human interests, sentiments, and affections which is the mode of conveyance of notarial communications.

"You ask me—"

"You have already consulted a lawyer! I thought it was understood between us—"

"I have sought legal advice in a supposititious case, from an unquestioned authority," giving the source. "As you will see, no names have been mentioned." Proceeding with the letter, "'You ask me, Would it be possible, the owners of a plantation dying, both husband and wife, the first year of the war, and the nurse running away with the only heir, an infant, that the overseer of the plantation could obtain possession of the property and retain it, unmolested, unquestioned, for seventeen years? I answer, he could, by chicanery and rascality—'"

"Sir! Sir!" The young man rose excitedly from his seat.

"'If he knew the child was alive. Suppose at the commencement of the war the owners of the plantation were in debt to the overseer, say for wages, the salary of a year or more. Overseers often preferred letting their

salaries accumulate before drawing them. The husband enlists, leaving the plantation in charge of the overseer, — a most natural arrangement. You say he is killed, the wife dies, the nurse disappears with the baby. New Orleans was captured in 1862. A United States District Court was established, having jurisdiction of the captured territory below the mouth of the Red River. Now the overseer, by going down to the city, if the plantation was in this territory,' — the Parish of St. James, as you are aware, Monsieur Frank, is within it, — ' by going down to the city and giving information that the owner of the plantation was a rebel, an officer in the army, concealing the fact that he was dead — ' "

" Monsieur! I cannot! I refuse to listen! " Morris Frank's face was red with anger, his eyes moist with feeling.

The notary continued, slightly hurrying his words: " ' Could have the property seized, condemned as the property of a rebel, purchase it himself at the confiscation sale, paying a nominal price, say five thousand dollars, for it, which five thousand he would not pay in cash,

but claim as a privileged debt the amount actually due, and make up the balance of the price by charges for overseeing, up to the date of proceedings. He could thus hold the plantation under an apparently legal title. No one but a child could contest.' "

"And the young lady?"

The notary's time was up. He was overdue upstairs with the contract.

"That point, I thought, was settled yesterday," said he, curtly. "Now, I must bid you good-day." He paused at the door; another thought came into his brain. For an instant he was embarrassed, undecided; then, dismissing his official character, and simply as an old gentleman with infinite worldly knowledge and infinite human sympathy, he laid his hand on the young man's shoulder: "My friend, reflect for an instant what the condition of the South would be at this moment were such titles to property as yours good; and," — his voice sinking with feeling, — "thank God that by the Constitution of the United States no attainder of treason can work corruption of blood or forfeiture, except during the life of the person

attainted." At a better recollection of his own family history, he said: "Children *here* are not punishable for the offence of an ancestor." Then, with a pressure of his sensitive fingers, he continued: "My boy, remember, restitution involves no confession. Fathers are but human beings like ourselves; when they die, the best thing we can do is to act for them as we wish they might have acted."

Mr. Frank also left the private office, but he halted in the next room, sat down at a desk, and pondered.

"Sir, I assure you, you do not know my father. He never made a mistake in his life. He was a man of unquestioned integrity." He repeated the words over and over again, as if the notary still could hear them.

Reared in the strictest of ecclesiastical colleges, where credulity had been assiduously fostered and simplicity preserved, his youth was passed in a calm world of perfect submission and perfect trust. In his uncritical mind the visible and invisible world rested on one vast quiescent billow of faith. His father, his

mother, his plantation; as well question the saints, miracles, heaven!

The clerks from their desks looked furtively at him as he buried his face in his hands, — the face of a man in helpless anxiety of mind. He had come to the city only three months ago in a vague search for some unknown pleasure which his swelling manhood craved, — a pleasure not to be found on the plantation, in the green fields under the blue sky, not in the morning *réveille* to duty, nor in the tired languor of the welcome curfew. The luxury which parsimony had banished from his parents' lives had descended to him intact, principal and interest, with the inheritance to buy it, — a heritage to spend and a heritage to gratify. The beautiful young girls at that Fleurissant ball! His life had never held a ball nor a young girl before. Oh, the plainest one there would have been a queen in his home, a *houri* in his heart! His home! Which home, — the little white-washed cabin near the sugar-house, where the sows littered under the gallery and the mules galloped by on their way to the stables, — the home of his birth, the despised overseer's house,

exhaling menace, inhaling hatred; or the other home, the home to which he returned from college, the master's residence, the beautiful home which his father had bought for him, with pictures and books, glass and silver, carved furniture and silken hangings? "By chicanery and rascality!"

He had lived in the house, slept in the beds, studied the books. And the pictures, — ah, Nature had given him such sordid, homely parents! He had idolized these pictured ladies and gentlemen. In adoration, he had tried to fit himself, not for heaven, but for them. He had tilled the fields as their successor, maintained the manor as their heir. "I assure you, there must be some mistake; my father was a man of integrity." If he had not integrity, what had he? Could he, the son, have lived in that house else? And his father and mother both slept in the cemetery of these people, — these Mottes!

Ideals of marriage had come to him during the long evenings in the quiet house. In fancy he had often led a bride across the threshold of it, — a black-eyed, black-haired bride, like the

black-eyed, black-haired women in the pictures; and imagination had gone still farther beyond, into those far-off dreams that lure the lonely into domesticity. The tears wet his fingers at the recollection of them.

Could his father have known of the existence of the child? That was all the question now; the plantation and the money in bank were a cheap exchange for the redeeming answer.

Searching wearedly among the commonplace incidents of his child-life for some saving memory which would give testimony in favor of the dead, as one turns and overturns domestic articles in search of a lost jewel, the figure of a quadroon woman came suddenly to remembrance, clear and distinct,— clearly and distinctly as her voice now sounded in the doorway.

"Monsieur requests the presence of the gentlemen who are to act as witnesses."

Two of the young clerks, in gala dress, who had been scratching their pens sedulously in feigned indifference to the honor, rose with alacrity.

This was the woman who had run away with

the child! Morris Frank arrested her, seized her by the wrist, and drew her in through the door of the back office. With an old instinct of fear she resisted and struggled. His father, the overseer, had not handled her color too softly.

"For God's sake let me go! What do you want? I have n't done anything!" she cried.

"Tell me, tell me the truth about that child,— about that baby!"

He questioned, he cross-questioned, he twisted and turned her answers.

"As there is a God in heaven, it 's the truth! As the blessed Virgin hears me, it 's the truth! Ask Monsieur Goupilleau, ask the priest, ask old Uncle Ursin on the plantation, — they all know it! Mr. Frank, Mr. Morris, you are not going to harm her! I kept it from you; I would have died before you found it out from me! She does n't know it! No one knows it!"

The same old terror of causeless violence that had made her a fugitive eighteen years ago possessed her again, sweeping away reason and presence of mind, making her believe, with the

barbarous anticipations of ferocity which had survived civilization in her, the tragic fate of the parents as immanent to the child.

"You swear it is the truth?"

"On the cross, on the Blessed Virgin, on the Saviour." All that was sacred in her religion, all that was terrific in her superstition, she invocated with unhesitating tongue to attest a veracity impugned with her race by custom and tradition.

It is not pleasant reading, — a marriage contract: stipulations in one clause, counter-stipulations in another; so much money here, so much money there; distrust of the contracting parties, distrust of the relatives, distrust of the unsophisticated goodness of God himself, who had trammels of every notarial variety thrown across any future development of trust and confidence. There were provisions against fraud, deception, indebtedness; provisions against change, indifference, enmity, death, remarriage, against improper alliances of unborn daughters, against dissipation and extravagance of unborn sons, — provisions for everything but the contin-

uance of the love which had waxed and grown to the inevitable conclusion of marriage.

It was a triumph of astuteness on the part of old Madame Montyon. She sat on the sofa nodding her head and purple-flowered bonnet, at each clause repeating the words after Monsieur Goupilleau with great satisfaction.

"*Ah, mon Dieu!*" Mademoiselle Angely sighed at the end of it, not knowing anything more appropriate to do or to say.

"Those marriage contracts, — they are all against the women, the poor women! That is the way with Eugénie there. Old Lareveillère made a marriage contract against her; she had nothing of her own, and all her life there he has held her." Tante Pauline pressed her right thumb expressively against the palm of her left hand.

"At the last moment I thought," said Madame Montyon to herself, "that Goupilleau would have given her something; but that was not like a notary, nor a Goupilleau."

"If I had succeeded in my plans," thought Monsieur Goupilleau, "the favor would have been all the other way."

"*Pauvre petite chatte!*" thought his wife, as a last resource of consolation, "at least her children will be secure."

"We will now sign it," said the notary.

"But I must go for the bride," prompted his wife.

They seemed to have forgotten her completely in their excitement over the settlement of so much property and money, — both her and the young man who stood unheeded, unconsulted, in the corner of the room; his own insignificant personal capital of youth, hope, strength, love, honor, ambition, unmentioned in the elaborate catalogue prepared by the step-mother. It was all valueless as an endowment. Like an automaton he had been provided for and given over to his childish foible for a wife.

The noise of the street invaded the parlors, but genteelly and discreetly sifted of impurity by the fine lace curtains at the end windows of the long narrow room. The half-closed shutters gave oblique views of the gallery, with its iron balustrade and canopy, and rows of plants thriving luxuriantly. They had only contracted pots

for root, but the whole blue heavens for foliage. There reigned the gentle obscurity which the people of the climate affect,—an obscurity that flatters rather than conceals the physiognomy, and tones the voices in soft Creole modulations. The green-glazed marine monsters of a tall Palissy vase collected the few entering rays of light, and rose a beacon over an invisible centre-table, which carried an indistinct collection of velvet-cased miniatures, ivory carvings, Bohemian glasses, and other small objects, which in Monsieur Goupilleau's days of extravagance gratified the taste for *bric-à-brac*.

There was a lull in the conversation. The occupants of the chairs and sofas devoted themselves to their fans and handkerchiefs, or put on eye-glasses to solve the enigmatical pictures hanging in oblivion, within gilt frames, on the walls. The moments of Madame Goupilleau's absence were slow, dry, and detached. What was said was hurried, indifferent, in an undertone, mere packing-paper to fill up space, each volunteer fearing to be caught with a truncated word or an unfinished smile on the lips,—the women of course alone risking it.

"Eugénie's rooms are really beautiful!"

"Can you see what that is in the corner?"

"An *étagère*."

"Ah!"

"I never noticed that lamp before."

"Where?"

"Right here at your elbow, on the table."

"*Carcel?*"

"And *ciselé* brass!"

"How warm it is!"

"I believe I feel a draught!"

"*Mon Dieu!* where?"

"Change your seat."

"There in the corner is a *fauteuil*."

"Who is that old skeleton?"

"Armand Goupilleau's confidential clerk!"

"Ah!"

"He will have to read the contract all over again!"

"Of course; the bride did not hear it!"

"I give them six months after the old lady's death to break it."

"H'sh! she'll hear you, Pauline!"

"*Tant pis!*"

"Here they are!"

"Poor little thing!"

"How pale she is!"

"And so frail!"

"Just like her mother."

"H'sh! they are going to begin!"

"Heavens! What a glare!"

"It is barbarous!"

Monsieur Goupilleau's confidential clerk was to repeat the deed, — an old man with sight almost beyond recall of double glasses. He stood as near as possible to the coveted daylight of the outside world, against the window, holding the paper as close to his eyes as his long thin nose would permit; it was still too far off for smooth reading. Profiting by the confusion succeeding the entrance, he slyly laid his hand on the shutters to widen the crack of light by the merest trifle; at a touch they all fell open from top to bottom, letting the sun in like a flash of lightning, striking them all with sudden distinctness, brightening the written page into delicious legibility. Before a countermanding order could be issued, before the bride could be seated, he began the lecture, overriding the protests of the ladies with his un-

human mechanical voice, cracked by use, ignoring the opened fans used as screens against his end of the room.

The young girl stood where she was. The sun falling across her head increased the fairness of her face and the blackness of her hair. She held her hands clasped before her, and seemed with eyes as well as ears listening to the terms on which she was to be admitted to the profession of her love. In the last hours of her innocent, unconscious girlhood she was pathetic, pitiful, to the ladies, who shed furtive tears. The gentlemen, at sight of her, felt a stirring in their hearts and conscience, or maybe the eyes of the married women present resurrected a primitive, latent, effete distrust of themselves, — a remorseful sense of unworthiness as conceded possessors of the other sex.

After the reading had ended, Marie Modeste still listened and thought, trying to make her head speak as distinctly as her heart had done.

"You will have the kindness to sign your name here, Mademoiselle," said the old clerk, delighted with his window evolution and the fluency of his rendition of the contract.

The young men from the office pressed forward alertly, under fear of the awful possibility of being overlooked. The ladies and gentlemen rose from their seats, and all advanced toward the centre-table, where a space was being cleared for the signing.

The young girl took the pen, which had been dipped in ink, and waited for the papers to be straightened out and pressed flat.

"Here, on this line, Mademoiselle." She placed her hand where he pointed, and bent over.

"No! no!" she cried, straightening herself, holding the document in her hand. Her face became red as she heard her weak, thin voice trying to raise and steady itself to audibility in the room full of strange faces.

"No! no! I cannot sign it! I will not sign it! I do not wish it! I refuse! I give nothing, I will take nothing, — nothing!"

She forced her lips, trembling convulsively, to utter what was resolutely being proclaimed in her breast.

"I give nothing but love! I want nothing but love!" and the elaborate act, the notarial

work of a week, fell in long thin strips to the floor.

There was a sudden decline in the value of bonds and stocks and landed investments; Madame Montyon's hillock of gold disappeared for once from before her eyes, leaving them staring at blank poverty.

"*Tudieu! Tudieu!*" she swore, in her unwhisperable voice.

"The marriage broken! Ah, I knew it!" exclaimed Tante Pauline.

"Eugénie! Eugénie!" Mademoiselle Aurore Angely pulled Madame Goupilleau's gown. "But look at them! Stop them! It is not proper! It is not *convenable!*"

It was against etiquette which had held him in strict quarantine for twenty-four hours; but the young groom broke from his corner and his passiveness, as unrestrained as if the wedding were past and not to come, and his bride, turning, received him as if she had all the money in the world and he not a cent. Their embrace made all hearts and lips envious.

Mademoiselle Angely would have had to acknowledge at the confessional that it was not

so much because it was shocking as because it was a sin, that forced her to turn her back on them.

The officious young witnesses sprang to the floor to gather up the fragments of the contract.

The confidential clerk, as deaf as he was blind, and equally conscientious, after showing the place on the document and giving the pen, was intent only upon closing the shutters as he had found them, and as slyly. The room passed again, without warning, into darkness, granting, until the eyes accommodated themselves to it, momentary shelter to the lovers and relief to the spectators.

"Ah! she's a fool all the same!" Tante Pauline found time to say.

"Come!" said Morris Frank, "take me up there, — instantly!"

Grasping the quadroon by the wrist, he followed up the stairs, through the hall, into a dark room separated by a *portière* from the parlor. Pushing aside the faded red and yellow damask, he stood, hearing, seeing all. The

flesh and blood, the face, of his pictured hosts in the old plantation home! The black-eyed, black-haired girl! What did she need more than love for a dower? And her lover? What other capital did he need besides the strength of the arms that clasped her? They would despise him, insult him, condemn his father, vilify his memory, — the usurper of a home!

"Speak! speak! for God's sake, speak!" whispered Marcélite at his side. She was afraid he would change his mind.

He had dreamed and basked under the eyes of her kindred, while she had been the *protégée* of a negro woman! Oh, the years beyond recall!

Would they dig up his father and mother, and cast them out of the pilfered grave?

Her father and mother, — where were they buried? What would he do with himself without a home, without a plantation, without a profession, without, — yes, without a reputation?

"Speak! speak!" muttered Marcélite.

"Ladies and gentlemen!" No, they had nothing to do with it. "Mademoiselle!" He crossed the room, pushing aside those in his

way; if they had been alone he would have knelt to her.

"Mademoiselle! it is all there waiting for you, ready for you, — your plantation, your servants, your home, the pictures, the books, the silver; there, just as your father left them to go to the war, just as your mother left them to fly to her death. Let me make restitution, let me make atonement; but oh, let me implore for the dead, — my father!" He looked so tall in the midst of them; in his emotion, his stiff, awkward language, so boyish! His ingenuous eyes were fixed on her face in simple, earnest, humble devotion, as many an evening he had fixed them on the portraits at home.

With swift, sure impulse, the quadroon woman put herself before him, took the words from his mouth, crazy as she was at the moment.

"It was my fault, Monsieur!" to Monsieur Goupilleau. "He did not know it! His father did not know it! I swear that old Monsieur Frank did not know it! I sent word myself that the baby was dead. Old Uncle Ursin knows it's the truth; ask him. Monsieur Frank sent him to me. I made him lie. My God!

I didn't know any better. I thought the Yankees would kill her too!"

Was it truth, or falsehood? There was no one to certify or convict. Old Uncle Ursin? He had been found dead in his bed before Morris Frank left the plantation.

"It is all there, and in bank," the young man continued. The bank-book was in his pocket; he got it, handed it to Monsieur Goupilleau. "You will find the amount—"

He mentioned it quite simply and naturally,—the amount which year after year had been growing in the bank, the result of many a day's hard work, the savings from a life's self-denial and parsimony. It was a fortune to astonish the little room, to strike even the women dumb. He thanked Heaven, as he mentioned it, that the spendings had been trivial.

"I never suspected it, I grew up unconscious of it. The woman, Marcélite, saw me at the ball; she told Monsieur Goupilleau. Mademoiselle, your marriage contract would have been different if—if I—"

But Monsieur Goupilleau would not allow any more explanation. It was a *coup de théâtre*

after his own heart,— a voluntary restitution, no lawsuit, no revelations; he could not improve it with any additions, any commendations of his own, for his voice in the general hubbub deserted him, his eyes blinded his spectacles. Frenchman as he was, if he could have been granted a son then and there, it would have been the young German, the overseer's boy, he would have chosen, as he told him over and over again, or tried to tell him.

"It is she who is too good for him, now," whispered Tante Pauline to Mademoiselle Aurore.

"*Hein!* She is a *partie*, after all!" Madame Montyon felt elated, for she flattered herself that it was she who by her determination had forced the hand of Providence. "I am going to have an angel for a daughter-in-law."

"Félix! Félix!" cried Mademoiselle Aurore, clasping her hands. "What can you say now against the good God? That superb plantation in St. James!" For the plantation was known all up and down the coast, and the fame of the Frank management was a State affair.

"*Bébé! Zozo!* Mamzelle Marie! To go

back! To see it all, — the pictures, the books, the furniture! You did n't believe me! You thought I was lying —"

"That quadroon will raise the roof off the house," said Tante Pauline; "when they begin their noise, there is no stopping them."

"Monsieur Morris," — Marcélite threw herself before him, — "let me work for you, let me be your slave —"

"*Mignonne! Mignonne!*" expostulated Madame Goupilleau with Marie. "You must not cry so, even for happiness! It is true, my child, it is all true! Do you not hear Charles, Armand, — all of them? *Enfin*, Marcélite! control yourself; you are exciting the child with your screaming. "*Non, Monsieur,*" to Charles, "to-day she is still mine; to-morrow I will not dispute her with you. Armand, my friend," to her husband, "send them all away, get rid of them, we must have some repose before the ceremony."

"Well, Goupilleau," said the Madame Montyon, composing her face after a pinch of snuff, "we are to have all our trouble over again!"

"Of course, Madame! of course, the young

lady's interests must now be protected." He stumbled against Marcélite. "Eh! my good woman!" My good woman! He raised her from the floor and held both her hands. "It is admirable, it is sublime. Why do you weep? He could not have done it better himself, — your Monsieur Motte!"

It was not Madame Goupilleau, but Marcélite, who walked behind the bride that night to the altar, for so Marie Modeste had commanded. It was not to Madame Goupilleau, but to Marcélite, that the bride turned for her first blessing after the ceremony. It was not Madame Goupilleau, but Marcélite, who folded away the marriage garments that night. It was not from Madame Goupilleau, but from Marcélite, that Charles Montyon received his bride. It was not Madame Goupilleau, nor any other woman, but Marcélite, who in her distant, unlighted room watched the night through, shedding on the bridal wreath the tears that only mothers shed on bridal wreaths of daughters, praying the prayers that only mothers pray on the wedding nights of daughters.

Time still carries on the story, life still furnishes the incidents; there is no last chapter to the record. The intercepted inheritance has come to the rightful heir, but it has not departed from the young German. Morris Frank had claims which not he, but Monsieur Goupilleau, asserted. He is part owner of the Ste. Marie plantation, sole manager; his crops rival the celebrated ones of his father; his yield of cane leads the statistics of his State. The old house he loved is still his home, — the home too of Marie Modeste, her husband, her children, and Marcélite.

They all live well, happily, prosperously together; for in giving hearts, God assigned destinies.

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